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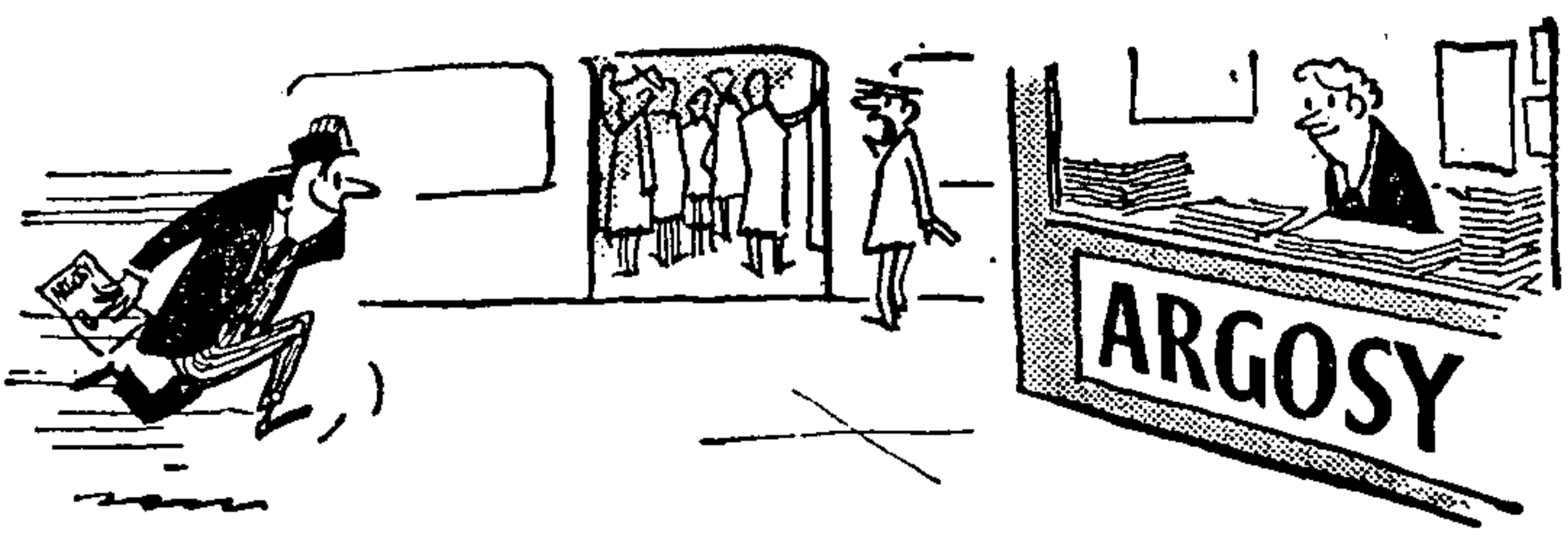

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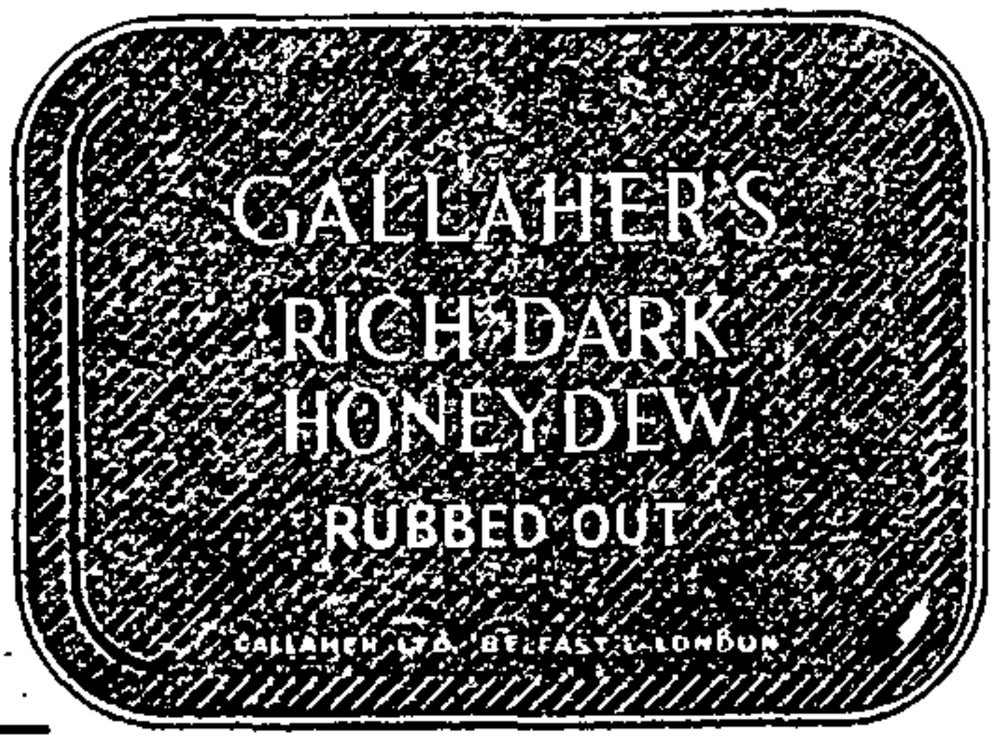

ARGOSY

A Fleetway magazine

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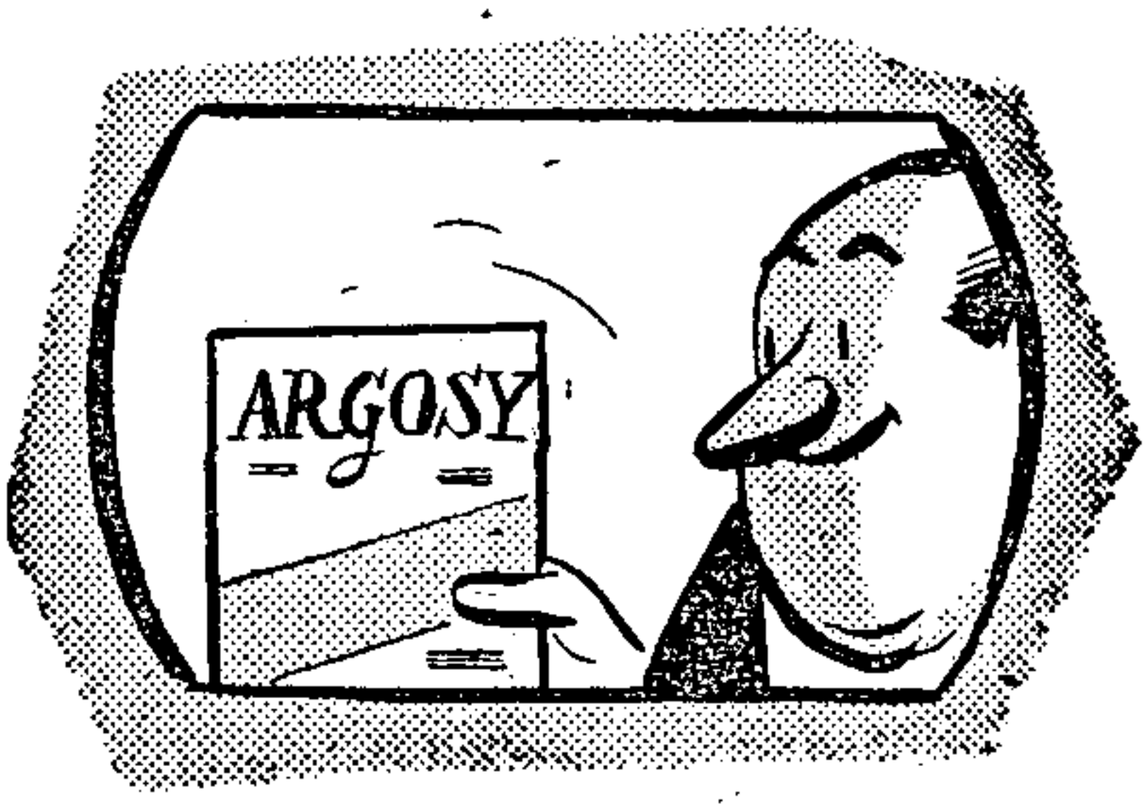


Log Book

OCCASIONALLY prone to nightmares, we dreamt, after a particularly indigestible session with Armchair Theatre the other evening, that we were sitting through a batch of TV commercials of more than common inanity.

First came three little ringletted girls, kicking up right legs out of ham-frill petticoats, and announcing:

Look for the tin
Don't worry what's in,
Look for the tin
With the Tip-Up Top !

(Shot of tin)

One of the nymphets then piped, " What's in the tin, Mary? "

" Cheam's Chullundur Chutney, the chutney you can cheerfully chuck away! "

(All) *Hooray, hooray, you can cheerfully chuck it away!*
(Con brio) *Cheam's—Chullundur—Chutney !*

Then followed a bride, who paused halfway down the aisle, turned to favour the congregation with a dazzling dental display, and sang, to the tune of Caller Herrin':

Buy a Wilson Wedding
They're smart and gay and labour-savin'
You'll be lifelong lovers if you
Wed the Wilson Way !

Long shot of bride and groom at altar, while a tawny, port-type male voice, full of bottled wisdom, and speaking with fatherly authority, urges, " Yes! Wilsons supply the whole wedding—church, flowers, champagne, presents, dresses, and even the groom! Just give us a ring—and the ring's on you! Wilson's *Wonderful* Weddings! "

While we were recovering from that one, three jolly gentlemen pranced on to the screen and began playing a dignified game of

musical chairs round two back-to-back armchairs, accompanied by the strains of the Eton Boating Song, and chanting,

Play, play the game, boys
Whatever the game may be
The prize is a winner
I know you will all agree.

The music stops and after a scurry round the chairs, one man drops out. The other two circle warily, eyeing each other over the remaining chair.

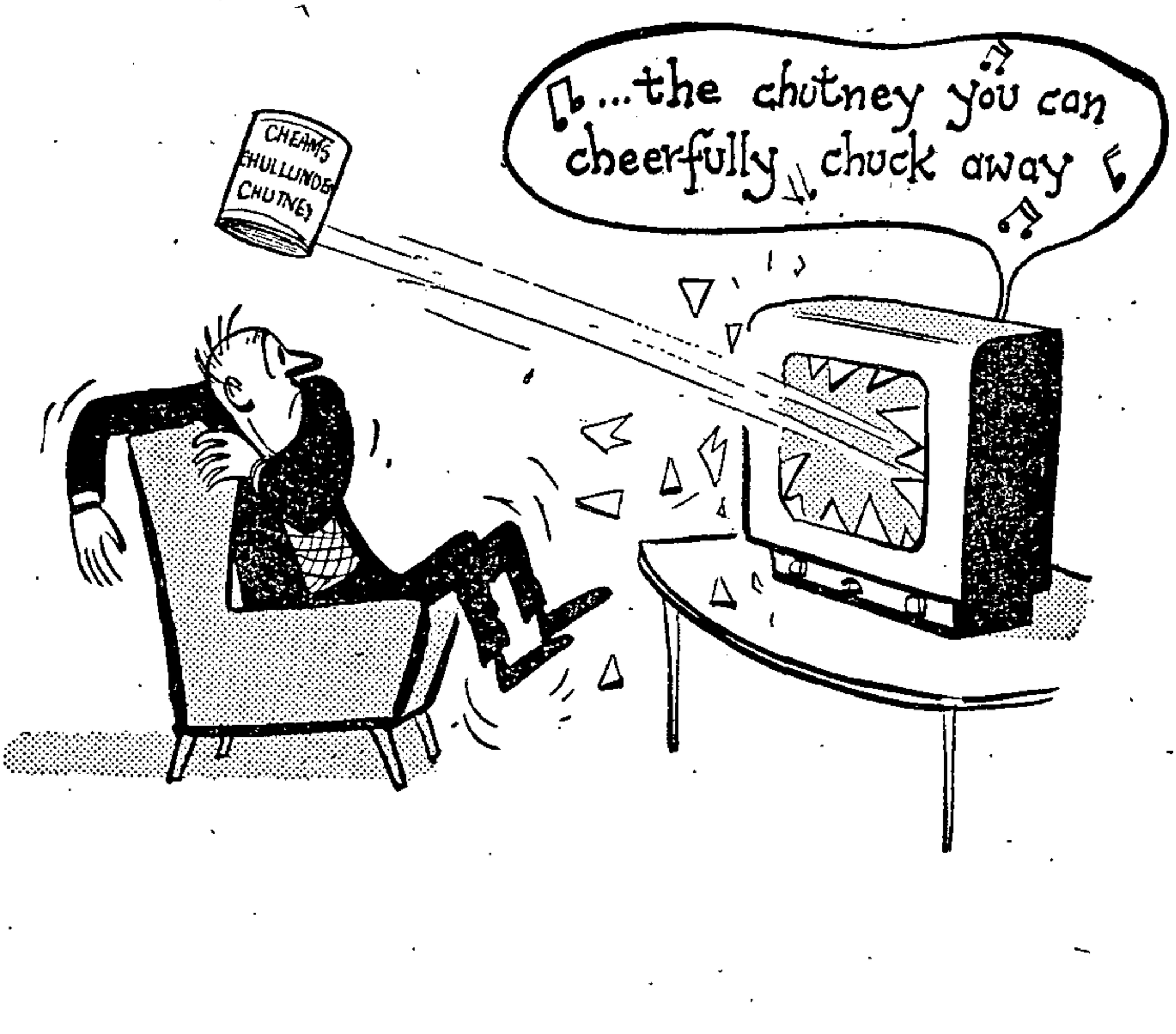
Play, play the game, boys
The prize, you will all agree
Is well worth the winning,
An armchair and ARGOSEE!

The winner drops into the chair and triumphantly holds up the current issue of Argosy, before settling down to a good read.

The announcer says cosily, "Remember! Argosy gives you hours of armchair entertainment. *Argosy*—the monthly with the most!"

At this point, mercifully, we woke to find that Horatio, A.B. (retd.) was bringing in a cup of tea, and that a bound volume of Argosy for Jan-June 1926 had fallen heavily on our toe from the top of the filing-cabinet.

Twelve new stories this month! Among our authors are:—



Geoffrey Household told us that he'd had more letters from readers about Abner, his delightful Cathedral cat, than any other story of his had ever called forth. We have another feline tale from him on page 73—but Suleiman Shah and Nur-ed-Din are cats of a very different colour from the puss of the Close.

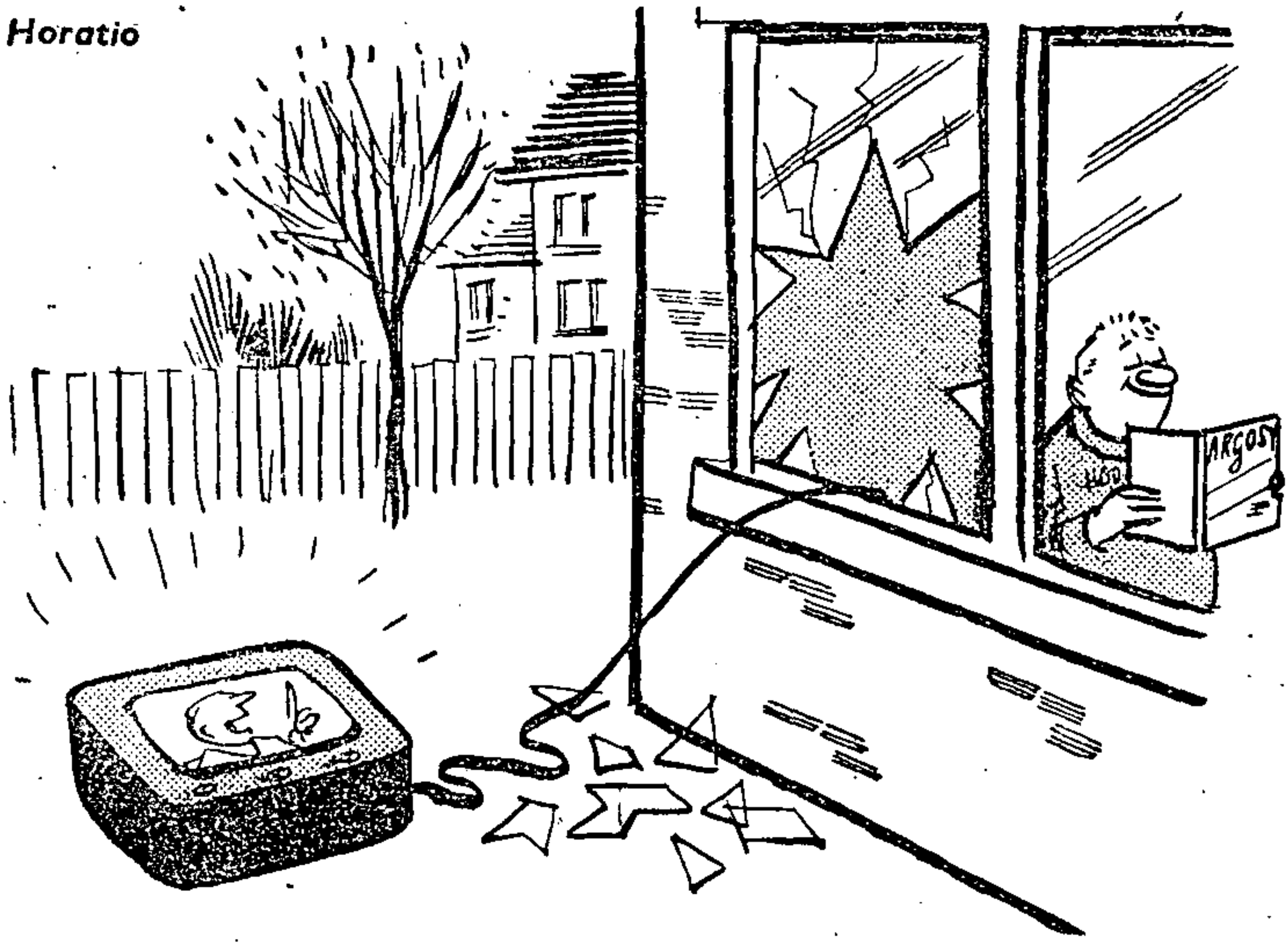
Detective-Inspector Patrick Petrella, who has so far evaded the snares of romance, comes dangerously near capture in **Michael Gilbert**'s new story *The Battle of Bank Street* on page 56.

Walter Macken, well-known Irish novelist, actor, and playwright has recently had one of his most familiar plays, *Home is the Hero* filmed under the title *Sins of the Fathers.* He himself took the lead part in the production. His new play, *The Voices of Doolin*, is to appear in Dublin.

Elisabeth Ayrton divides her time between cookery, travel, and family life—the family consists of husband Michael Ayrton, painter and sculptor, plus three daughters. Not long ago she wrote an almost edible novel, *The Cook's Tale*, about a great French culinary family.

Verne Athanas was the eldest of five children; his father, an immigrant to the U.S.A., spoke no word of English, his mother came of covered-wagon settler stock. He lives on Bear Creek, at the foot of the Siskiyou mountains, and has personal experience of logging and the outdoor activities that form the basis of his stories.

JOHN SILVER



ORDINARY MAGIC

He pointed to her hair
and said some foreign word softly

BY D. SLEIGHTHOLME

THIS is what Susan was to remember, even when she had grown old. A grocer's shop one autumn dusk and burbling naked gas-jets.

The grocer's face would fade with time, but his white apron and the great spread of his paunch resting on the counter with a soiled line where it touched—that she would remember, because she had kept her gaze low in her awful humiliation.

What she would recall, vivid as a shout in a dream, was the pyramid of jam-jars which at first swayed, then buckled in the middle, seeming to hang in mid air, and then slowly, like a tired woman bending to sit, descended to split the air with a roar of breakage. And she hadn't pushed the pile out of spite at her humiliation, she had only touched it.

Perhaps the humiliation would remain longest in her memory, because at sixteen such things have painful power; yet because of it she came to a sort of magic. That was where her grandfather's gold sovereign came in . . .

Susan was with her mother, she had come to help carry the weekly order. For those Victorian times the shop was brightly lit, or perhaps the raw evening, blue with dusk and the East Coast haze which came in off the sea, made it seem so. Maybe though. it was the imagined limelight which attends humiliation.

Susan hadn't wanted to go. Her mother's old blue coat with its wisp of fake fur and her own cheap rig made her sensitive to places with lights, and the shop was filled with people she knew: but that was the way it was, of course.

As for Susan herself, she had the tall grace of smoke rising on a still morning; and her hair was red, but such a red that people had to look and look to believe. Ordinary people who were not poets had to liken it to something in their minds before they could be satisfied.

In the shop she felt the other customers staring at her and so she hated them all. She was used to stares, but now that she was almost a woman she had begun to resent poverty and to look for

excuses for shame, so she hated the bright light and her mother's little fake collar and shabby coat.

The grocer made a cairn of the groceries on the counter and ticked with a pencil on a bag of sugar. The bacon slicer sang, the air was spiced, and by her elbow the pyramid of jam rose into shadow. The grocer's tone was level, "Nine and six, Mrs. Noakes."

Susan's mother had a leather purse with clasps which twisted. She opened it below the counter, out of his sight. She had ten and sixpence in it. She put nine shillings and sixpence on the counter. The grocer stood and waited. The money made a small gleam like the eye of a mouse. She echoed, "Nine and six."

He had a smile on his face. He tapped the counter with his pencil. "That's for these items, madam."

Susan felt a chill in her stomach. She felt her toes begin to contract inside her boots. Her mother cupped her chin in her gloved hand, one finger to the side of her mouth, her lips were a little pursed as though she was about to whistle, and she stood there looking down at the little pile of coins. She waited.

The grocer said loudly, "I was thinking about the five and eleven from last week, madam."

Susan was staring at his belly; she dug her nails into her palms and wanted to run, run, out of the light, away from this monstrous shame. Instead, she stood there; and the shame of it grew and rumbled towards her like a delirium. Her mother had altered her voice. She had put on her fake accent of genteel dignity. Susan had admired it once. Her mother had been a match for the world with that accent. Now, for the first time, it knifed across her ears.

She thought, Oh tell the man you can't pay; tell him Father's at sea on the barge and we can't pay until he gets in; and tell him we mayn't pay him then if the trip's been bad; tell him anything so we can go.

Susan's mother said, in her genteel voice, "Why, Mr. Kendall, just fancy me forgettin' that, now! Why, I'm sure I'll be forgettin' my head next." She made the aitch sound like a breath.

The agony went on. The grocer stood. The woman and her daughter stood. Silence surrounded them.

She said, "Well, now let me see." She went through the pretence of searching her purse while Susan stared down at the counter and the nine shillings and sixpence. The grocer waited.

When the farce was over, her mother said, "Well, there's a bother; I don't seem to have any more change. I'd better pay for these things an' drop the other in later, by bearer." She gave the little pile of coins a small push towards the grocer.

He said, " I think it'd be easier to settle the whole thing at one go, lady." He called over his shoulder, " Freda, put these things up for Mrs. Noakes, will you? She'll be sending for them later." He began to walk away then.

Susan prayed, Oh Mummy, come now, quickly.

Her mother in the blue coat and the sham collar, raised her voice for the benefit of the whole shop. " Well," she said, " I won't stay here and be insulted, I shall have to take my custom elsewhere. I've never been so insulted in my whole life."

It was then, in trying to pull her mother's coat to make her stop, that Susan pushed the pile of jam-jars. . .

Afterwards, when the people had stopped rushing round and the mess was cleaned up, the grocer said that there would be fifteen shillings more to pay.

Hurrying home through the blue-dusk streets, Susan let the scolding voice of her mother flow over her unopposed. " I'm sorry, Mummy," she said for the twentieth time.

" *You* are! " her mother said. " What's to do now, I don't know. There's only one thing I can think of, and that's that sovereign of your grandad's. It may be precious to him, but so's food precious to hungry stomachs."

Then they were home in the house in the row by the timber quay, a row in which all the houses had circular plates in their walls, like flat breasts, put there to keep the walls from cracking and bulging. The railway ran close and the houses were blackened.

Grandfather sat in his corner watching the fire like a comfortable family dog. He was a worn old man, blasted to bones and leather by North Sea winters, pale-eyed like a March sky, shrewd as a wind off the saltings.

His presence seemed to aggravate Susan's mother. She began scolding again. Susan could stand no more.

" Oh, stop it, Mummy," she shouted.

Her mother slapped her face. The sound was flat, like a book falling. Her mother went out quickly into the scullery where the sink and the pump were. There was a candle burning there and her shadow spread over the ceiling. Susan bent and poked the fire. The bright flames seemed to send splinters of light darting out. She wiped her eyes.

Grandfather had watched. He said, " People are always a-pokin' that fire; let it be, girl; let it alone. Jab, jab, jab like a lot of ol' gulls a-hammering sprats."

Tonelessly she asked, " When do you think he'll get in, Grandad? "

" If the tide serves an' the wind is fair, he'll be in as soon as he's there," the old man rhymed.

"He's just *got* to get in," she said. "We've no money until he does. There's not a thing in the house, Gran, and we can't have the groceries until we pay for that—mess."

"If he's had a bad voyage we mayn't have much then either. I remember that time in the old *Grace Toiler*," her grandfather began, "the time I rescued the crew of the timber ship and the Prince gave me my gold piece for it—"

"Oh, Gran. Not again, please; not tonight."

Her mother came out from the scullery. "Father," she said, "if you had any feeling you wouldn't go swanking about your gold sovereign when we haven't a farthing in the house. It might look better if you handed over your precious sovereign."

He looked at her for a long time, screwing up his eyes as if she was in the distance. Then, "No, no, Bertha. You wouldn't want me to; you wouldn't, would you? The Prince give it me, Bertha; you wouldn't ast me to?"

The woman's voice rose. "You sit at the fire, Dad; you're warm, you're fed—"

"Bertha, don't be that cruel, girl. That hurts. I'd do more if I could; but this sovereign, it's not like—real money."

"Real enough with an empty larder, Dad."

Grandfather had his head down, but Susan saw a muscle twitching in his jaw. "Mother, let him be. Sell something of mine. It was my—"

Her mother kept her mouth in a straight line like the mouth of a snowman, made of stick. Grandfather said no more. He got up and made his way stiffly to the staircase.

Susan called, "Good night," to him, but he seemed not to hear.

"Never mind," her mother said. "I'll get it when he's asleep." She raised her hand. "It's no use, Susan; I'm going to do it. For years I've scrimped and saved, but I've always been able to pay my way and keep respectable till now. Father's welcome in this house, but while his family need pennies I'll not see him selfish over some fancy notion about a gold piece."

They didn't have long to wait.

A lifetime of sleep stolen in snatches often in frozen clothes in the bellowing blackness of the Dogger winter had made the old man an easy sleeper, even at times of emotional stress. Susan heard the quiet movement of her mother's feet on the bedroom floor above, and a moment later she was down again.

"Take that look off your face, girl; he's going to get it back. Take it to Steinmann; pawn it. I don't want a word. Here."

Susan felt shame eating at her like a corrosive acid. She began to speak. Her mother's face was tight as Susan took the coin.

"Tell him to save it apart; we'll redeem it when your father

gets in. If you think there's shame in pawning," she added, " think of the shame there'll be if we can't pay for that mess you made."

Susan walked slowly along the street. As she passed the lamps her shadow shortened and then ran ahead. The gold sovereign in her hand seemed to mark her flesh.

It was fully dark, although not more than six o'clock. The pavement was wet and the mist came in from the sea, thin, yet damp so that the houses glistened. A few people were out, hurrying home. A horse and dray came past and she heard the cup-sound of the hoofs go ahead of her. At sea, a ship hooted once.

At the end of the street was the river and the barge quay. She went there. The river smelt of sea-mud which is different from the mud of the land, black with decay. The smell was of salt and fish and seaweed and it chilled her nostrils like spirit. Susan had a forlorn hope that as she came out on to the breadth of the quay she would see the huge black bat's-wing sail of her father's barge moving against the sky. There were two or three barges, but their sails were brailed and their spars had the winter look of bare trees.

Her father would be coming from London River—coming down north, as bargemen say, because of the ebb tides which run from the south to the north. Sailing barges work their tides. He would have moved with it, taking the north-going ebb as a landsman would catch a train at a certain time. Travelling by it as long as it served, ghosting through the night on the thin breeze. But he would need a touch of flood tide to take her into the harbour, Susan thought.

She looked over the quay. The ebb was almost finished, and the receding water left the mud bare and whispering as it dried. Perhaps there will be a fisherman, she thought, who has seen the barge somewhere out there waiting for the new flood.

The quay was a place where she had always been forbidden to wander after dark. It was broad, with bollards which had been cannon in their time and which now thrust their cold snouts out of the earth so that the ships, making port safely, could hold on to the solid land for a little while. Well back from the edge of the quay was a line of buildings, and between the two a set of railway lines shone in the pale light. The buildings were mainly taverns and offices and a few lodging houses: a mean district, but as far inland as the sailors ever got in the old East Anglian town.

The quay was deserted. The wind bit through her clothes and wuthered in her ears for all it was so small a breeze. There were

lights in the windows of the taverns which shone out across the quay and touched the spars of a billyboy moored to the bollards, giving them a delicacy that daylight denied them, as dew makes magic of a cobweb. She could hear a piano jangling in one of the taverns and the insect hum of voices. She stood irresolute.

Then swing doors burst apart, the hum swelled to a roar, and the piano sounds clanged; a man came hurtling out backwards, with his arms circling, he went into a sprawling heap, slithering on his back, and his head made a sound like a marrow as it hit the road. He lay still.

Susan gasped and ran to where he was. She went on her knees and lifted his head. He lay in a shaft of light from the door and she saw that his cheek was smooth and young. 'My God, he's dead, she thought. She felt panic rise in her throat. She thought, I must get a doctor.

Then the man sat up; quite suddenly, he just sat up. He began to shout in a foreign language and, pushing her aside, he struggled to his feet and staggered towards the tavern door. He took a few steps and then stopped, thinking.

He turned and came back to where she was still kneeling. He squatted near her, swaying a little, and looked at her.

"I hope you're—all right," Susan said uncertainly.

He just stared at her.

"I'll get a doctor."

He shook his head. "Not Dokter; no." He stared and smiled.

Susan smiled weakly and got up. "Be careful then," she said.

He stood, too.

As he staggered Susan exclaimed, "Oh, be careful. Look, you'd better sit down again."

He said, "Boot," and pointed.

"I'll help you," Susan told him. "Which is your boat?"

They walked to the edge of the quay and he leaned against her. His arm was round her neck for support and she could feel his thigh, hard as wood against her own. Panic crept into her mind again, and with it excitement, a forbidden elation, her mind blank to reason.

They went on a little way and came to a gangplank leading down to the deck of a brig which lay at the wall with her yards cock-billed. The vessel was silent with the dead silence of ships when the water leaves them. There was a companionway leading below and a vestige of a light filtered up from it. She would have left him at the gangplank but he clutched at her arm and leaned heavily. Together they went down.

There was a foc'sle. The lamp there was a bully-light; a tin

of rank oil in which a wick of wool floated. It was on a bare plank table, scrubbed like a bone. The place was filled with shadows that crept as the flame crept and wavered crouching in their corners. Great beams and curving timbers made of the place a wooden cave.

She saw then that he was barely older than herself. Tall, but with thin, square wrists thrusting from his too-short sleeves and the makings of a beard that framed his boy's chin like a fancy dress. He motioned to her to sit on one of the sea-chests. He sat across the table from her. He just stared at her.

Time passed and no word was spoken. Susan could hear the low hum of the wind through the rigging, and a rope tapping the mast monotonously. Still he stared, though not boldly. Once he knocked the little lamp so that it sent up a chain of tiny red sparks, and they nodded and smiled, then fell to immobility again.

The piano was a faraway tinkling bell. A dog barked twice, remotely.

They both smiled again, as if it was funny, a dog barking. He imitated the bark to make her smile, then he looked solemn and his ears glowed red. She saw his throat jerk as he swallowed.

The silence was warm wool enfolding them.

He pointed to her hair after a long moment and said some foreign word softly. Susan felt the colour rise to her cheeks. Then she loosened her hair, both hands raised to free it.

His eyes flickered to her young breasts. Susan didn't mind.

His eyes went to her hair and back and down at his own hands. She smiled. She leaned towards him and took his hand and brought it to her hair. Her hair flowed down over her breasts.

His hands were awkward, like puppies. Then he withdrew them and let them lie on the table, huge in his shyness.

Silence again.

Thinking of something, he took from his pocket a length of cord. Working with great urgency, he made a complicated knot in it while she watched. Each time he looked up she nodded her encouragement. When it was finished he let her admire it. Susan felt a great wisdom and knowingness pass through her.

She went over and stood close to him, looking down on him. His hands were half open on his lap. He looked up and she took his hands again. She was sure and confident in her new womanhood.

Footsteps came down the wooden companionway; loud voices were yelling songs. In a moment the small space was filled with huge men and a smell of wet wool and leather, and drink-laden breath. Each man, each Dutchman as he came below and saw Susan, paused and then made a great show of laughter. The

bellowing, the wide mouths, and the pale eyes made her think of the shuffling agitation of the cattle market. She felt the men like a raw force, primitive as fire and meat, and as harsh as rough hides to touch. She was aware of her breasts and their hands and her softness. She felt alarm.

There was a man who must have been the captain. As he looked from the boy to her, he said, " Eh, what thing this, what thing, what thing? You mek our babby a man now eh, little redhead. Now we got pay Peter a man's wage, eh? " He bellowed with laughter, repeating his question in Dutch for the benefit of the other men.

" Now, Petermann—" the captain spoke with his head to one side, wagging it as foreigners do, in mock seriousness—" this little redhead who meks you a man, you have pay her? "

The boy was white at the lips. His face suddenly wooden. Susan had no feeling at all. It was humiliation such as she could not have believed. Her mouth felt strained tight, her eyes suddenly wet. The affair of the groceries seemed like a thing from another life, so long ago that the people involved were strangers.

He was looking past her, avoiding her eyes. He brought his cupped hand, filled with small coins, out of his pocket. He searched feverishly through his coat, and there were more coins. The men laughed, far away beyond the pair. There were only the two of them and the hand with the money in it. Susan made him look at her. His eyes were miserable and defiant.

Susan found her hand taking the money from him. It seemed to be behaving of its own will. Here was the pride of a man—new to her and strange, yet oddly at one with something she knew. The boy still looked at her as if he could not let his eyes leave her, as though there was a link and reassurance, a holding on like the ship's ropes to the bollards.

She let her eyes tell him what he wanted to know. She smiled gently at last, and he saw her nose crinkle at him imperceptibly.

This was the fellowship of men, the pride of belonging, and acceptance bought at the cost of humiliation. Susan saw his expression change and relief brightened it. His deception weighed on them but gratitude shone from his eyes and she accepted it from him.

She had no proper memory of leaving the brig. She was only aware of the astringent chill of the wind in her face and of running, gulping the cold air as she ran.

Her mother's jaw was set. " You've been over an hour, girl," she said. " What in pity's name have you been up to? "

"He was shut; I had to wait," Susan lied.

Her grandfather's eyes, pin-bright, watched her, round the back of his chair.

"How much did he lend on it?" her mother asked.

Susan hesitated and handed over the money. Her mother counted the coins. "That old Jew ought to be in prison," she said. "There's eighteen shillin' here, and of all things a foreign one mixed up with it. The sauce!"

There was a look of disbelief on the old man's face. He asked incredulously, "He *paid* you on it?"

But Susan was staring at the small foreign coin. She reached for it.

"That can go back along with the rest tomorrow," her mother said. "Your father's in. Will saw him anchored off the harbour mouth."

That night Susan lay in the narrow iron bed, and her mind ran free and bold in the secret darkness. In her young, inarticulate longing she whispered aloud in the darkness, telling herself how it had been so that she could hear it with her ears, imagine his voice and her own, speak the same words, feel the touch of his hands. Her own voice, sibilant in the quiet night, made it real again and believable.

There had come just this man, shy and with his big uncertain hands and hard arms . . . Finally she wept under the bedclothes, and her sobs were luxurious, quenching, like great gulps of water, like great shouts relieving an anger, like anything that gave her soul a voice.

But when at last she slept, it was not of Peter the Dutchman that she dreamt but of that glass tower of jam-jars which swayed and came crashing down to trap her.

Her father arrived at dawn, as he so often did. She heard the front door, the drowsy rumble of voices, her mother's slippers on the flagged floor, saw candlelight beneath her bedroom door, fanning over the wall; and Susan slept again.

She woke to a day full of sunlight and brisk movement. Her mother seemed serene now.

"Get over to the pawnshop and redeem that sovereign, Susan," she said. "Lord knows, there'll be nothing but black looks till you do. I'll take the grocer his money myself. Get over there right after breakfast, dear."

"Why not?" Susan asked herself. Why not then—see him again, give him back his money? The other men needn't know.

Once she had decided, a kind of panic took possession of her. She went quickly, not even waiting for breakfast.

There was a short cut to the quay where the Dutch ship lay.

Susan went along it between mean houses where the soapy washing drooped about her face and children chalked on the cobbles. It terminated in a narrow chasm of leaning brick where there was no sun and her footsteps echoed like a well.

The ship was preparing for sea, Susan knew the signs well. The ship with her topsails loose in the buntlines, sheeing in the breeze, chain-nips jangling aloft, gaskets off the courses, was on the point of departure.

She reached the quay. Men were busy on the decks, securing hatches, loose gear. There was no sign of Peter.

She had to see him.

She recognised the captain from the previous night. He made no sign of knowing her, although his eyes strayed to her hair.

"Peter? Peter?"

The men glanced up, smiled. One shook his head.

"Oh, where is he? Peter, please; is he there?"

The men stood grinning. Then the captain shouted angrily and they turned to their work again. But one of them, she couldn't recall him, said, "Peter go town quick—for bread."

She gasped her thanks. There was still a chance then. The ship wouldn't sail without him. She looked up the road, and distantly, bright in the sun, she saw a man with a pale golden head running to the town.

"Peter, wait."

She began to run after him. Behind her the crew of the ship were laughing. The man in front moved quickly, but her feet flew over the cobbles, the tram lines, the dusty pavements. She began to overtake him, trying to form in her mind what she must say. Now that it was so close, she felt shyness overcoming her.

"Peter, I—"

The man turned. He had a long, goat-like face. He grinned stupidly.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I thought . . ."

Then she remembered the ship again, and with a dart of fear she turned. There were men aloft, and the jib was creeping up, wrinkled like a butterfly leaving its chrysalis. She heard the far sound of a hauling shanty. Under her breath she sobbed, "Oh, let me find him; let me or I'll never see him again."

She began to run desperately now, with hot tears in her eyes which made the shape of the distant ship sway and swim like melting wax. The money in her hand was wet. Her hair felt hot.

She didn't see him until he loomed up before her and his arms were wide to catch her stumbling onrush.

Behind him on the brig the captain was yelling, but the boy took no notice.

Perhaps Susan was in his arms for only a few seconds. It could hardly have been longer, for the span of water between the ship and the quay was opening like a split in a sheet.

For those few moments she forced her face against his coat, in the hollow of his neck, where the angle of his cheek was brushed by her hair. She drew deep breaths, mastering her tears, marshalling her words. Then, before she could speak, his hand was on her cheek, passing lightly down over the curve of her shoulder, following the line of her waist, drawing her closer.

Afterwards, when he was gone, Susan would believe that he had kissed her and she would smile to think of it, but he hadn't kissed her. Only for seconds they stood, but she could feel the strange alarm of her own heart and the warmth of him—his power, his uncertainty, and his lonely youthfulness.

Then she pressed the money into his hand and he smiled. They both laughed, and he shook her gently back and forth. Then the captain's voice broke upon their ears and it was over.

"In little while—coming again—wait—wait." Then Peter ran, leapt, and landed sprawling in the rigging.

Susan watched the ship as she set her sails and grew faint in the distance. When the ship had become a far-off blue tower leaning against the sky she unclenched her hand to look at the Dutch coin which she still held.

Her grandfather was sitting on the back step, chopping sticks. He kept his head low as she approached, so that she saw only the dusty peak of his cap.

"Gran."

He shook his head. "I don't want it back no more, girl."

"Gran, I've got your sovereign here." The chopping continued.

"Gran."

"I ain't so sure I want it now, Sue."

"But—oh, I know how you feel, Gran—but Mummy had to. She didn't want to, but she was so worried. It wasn't her fault—if I hadn't knocked over that jam. It's all my fault really that we had to pawn—"

"You never went nowhere near a pawnshop."

"But, Gran."

"You never, though. Now tell me, girl, did you go to the pawnshop?"

"No, Gran."

He shook his head. "Ducky, now tell me honest. You was with the sailors, wasn't you?"

"It wasn't like *that*." She clenched her fists. "Gran, listen. It wasn't—like—that!"

Something fell from her hand, rolled in a small spiral, and came to rest shining at the old man's feet.

He bent stiffly and picked it up; then he smiled, peering up under his shaggy eyebrows at her. "All right, me love; now I knows your secret, don't I? You been a-courtin'."

She told him then, awkwardly, her face hidden beneath the red flood of hair.

He was nodding, thinking. "Now," he said slowly, "the gold sovereign, and I'll show you my secret."

She held it to him. He turned it over on her palm and she saw that it was a coin without a head. Instead, there was inscribed, *Batcher's Sovereign Calf-meal Worth Its Weight in Gold.*

"Oh, Gran!"

"There's my prince, then. Now here, take your coin, girl. Take your prince, put it in a pocket, an' maybe it'll turn to gold; mine did, an' mine was only a dud." © D. Sleightholme 1960

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SAYING IT WITH FLOWERS

In 1858 a carnation proclaimed "Fascination," but in 1867 it could mean "Disdain," and one can imagine a slightly elderly beau much puzzled by a young lady's reception of his well-meant posy. And even if the vocabulary was safely established there were other hazards. . . . Would it be reasonable to expect any girl given a House Leek to feel complimented on her Vivacity? In what posy (quite apart from in what circumstances) would one present a lettuce, for Coldness, or a gourd, for Bulk? . . . Could any young lady be expected to put up tamely with the mental picture of her which is called up by the sign for Never Ceasing Remembrance—a bunch of Cudweed. And how awkward for a modern student of the language if he sends her, as a token of his Remorse—a Raspberry!

Hazards for Gallants,
from The Times, March 23, 1957

Come into the orchard, Anne,
For the dark owl, Night, has fled,
And Phosphor slumbers, as well as he can
With a daffodil sky for a bed:
And the musk of the roses perplexes a man,
And the pimpernel muddles his head.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

ROGUE OF NAT SIN

Each flash of lightning sizzled
in the torrential rain

BY J. H. WILLIAMS

THE strangest tree in the mixed deciduous forest of Upper Burma is the bawdi or nyaung bin. It is not really a tree. It begins life as a creeper which throws out arms writhing like boa-constrictors until they grip the nearest tree. These arms encircle the trunk, climb steadily upwards and first envelop and finally strangle their host.

As the core on which it has raised itself decays, huge buttresses grow out at its base to support its weight. They often grow to such a size that they can form a stall large enough to give protection to an elephant and her calf.

The Burmese Buddhist considers that nats, or spirits, live within the empty shell lying at the heart of the bawdi bin. There is always a shrine at the base of one of these trees, if it is close to a village.

As a Forest Assistant I soon came to bless the bawdi bin, because it afforded the only cool shade for my tent in the months of the hot season. It also provided me with many a meal from the wild green pigeons which come to gorge on the black berries it bears.

But I found that my Burmans did not at all like sheltering beneath it . . .

The bawdi or nyaung bins are more than strange when they are fully grown. They are both eerie and dangerous; eerie because they are hollow inside, a sort of vegetable tower; dangerous because in the walls of this bawdi bin tower there are innumerable large and small holes or windows in which lizards, snakes, and other animals can seek dark hiding-places.

I once took shelter under one of these old nyaung bins during the month of May, when the violent electric storms give warning that the monsoons are about to break. I was exploring for teak in the large divide between the rivers Chindwin and Myitta. We were working up an unnamed watershed; but the precipitous

ridge we intended to cross next day was called for some reason "Nat Sin" or "Elephant Ghost."

We were ahead of my four travelling pack elephants, just my gun-boy and myself. The gun-boy refused to follow me into the shelter of the nyaung bin. He made for a large clump of bamboos about fifty yards away. As he did so, I thought that perhaps he had been wiser than I, but I wasn't going to acknowledge it.

My shelter was enclosed on three sides, the main bole in the centre with enormous buttresses on either flank. Above, a dense canopy of leaves made a roof; in the trunk was a hole large enough for me to creep inside.

The force of the storm was terrifying. It seemed as if all the trees in the jungle would be laid low. Each flash of lightning appeared to sizzle in the torrential rain and almost simultaneously it was followed by an ear-splitting peal of thunder which sounded loud enough to discharge rocks from the escarpments towering above us.

I was already drenched to the skin with the rain, which was more than warm. It was almost hot. I turned towards the gaping hole in the tree, holding the palms of my hands over my ears to save myself from the deafening thunder claps.

Suddenly there was a flash of lightning brilliant as magnesium and there, standing in the hole, as if in a rack, was a gun.

I was so astonished that for some moments I remained motionless, as if I had been "struck." Then I reached forward, deep into the recess, and fumblingly grasped a firearm of some description. It was, you can understand, a very odd sensation, like finding on a drawing-room carpet the pug-marks of a tiger.

It was a very rusty rifle, which had grown green and yellow from exposure in the jungle. I rubbed the stock against my dripping shorts and shouted excitedly to my gun-boy.

He ran across thinking I had found something good to eat like an iguana lizard. His face dropped when he saw it was only a gun, and useless at that. And then his curiosity was roused by the find. How on earth had the gun been left in this hiding-place and then not reclaimed?

"Tha nat gyi," he said, looking at it. He saw at once that it was a rifle not a shotgun. It was a double-barrelled black-powder rifle. But the breech and hammers were so rusted that we could not break it to see whether it was loaded.

When the storm cleared, we spent the evening together in camp, oiling it, and trying to open it, but without success. The oozies clustered round, curiously. Their unanimous opinion was that dacoits or robbers had stolen this rifle from some

Thakin or Forest Assistant years before. Then they had forgotten exactly where they had hidden it, or perhaps they had been captured or killed. It was one of those mysteries which one finds so often in the jungle.

We had to work out our own mysteries, and I could see the fun we would have when I returned to Forest Headquarters inventing plausible reasons why a double-barrelled black-powder rifle should be hidden in the hollow of a nyaung bin. We might even discover the truth, but if we didn't, we should at least have passed the time.

I worked on the oozies' theory. The Nat Sin ridge was certainly a perfect hideout for dacoits. It was filled with caves, perfect as robbers' dens. But in order to build up the picture, we needed some local evidence. And there were no villages in this area.

The first sign of human habitation we struck was three days' march away, a place called Pya, above the Zennapok Gorge in the Upper Taungdwin river. To call it a village would be flattering, because there were only eight inhabited huts.

I've seldom seen jungle Burmans living at so low a level. It wasn't true to say that they merely lived off the fruits of the jungle. There were a few clearings where patches of hill rice were being cultivated. But it was a poor place compared with the normal happy Burmese village. All the same, after three months spent under the unbroken canopy of the jungle, it was good to see God's sky and hear the barking of dogs and the cooing of doves.

It was already evening when I arrived. I camped on the river bank. I did not expect any callers. Pya had ceased to be important enough to have a village headman, though it was plain from the ruins of a large dilapidated monastery that, many years before, Pya had been a far more prosperous place.

I had just settled down for the evening when a visitor approached my tent. He was a Yathé, a hermit monk, easily distinguished from the orthodox Burman priest by his tan-dyed robe and his long stave. These hermit monks are mendicants, who prey on superstition to get food or money. They do not teach the scriptures to the jungle people. They merely frighten them with the supernatural.

I was not very pleased at this visit. The hermit was very old. His body was wizened and his limbs withered. He was dirty and poor and his white hair was closely shorn. I did not want to see him, because I felt sorry for him.

Aung Net offered him a camp chair. That was the custom with all visiting monks and priests. But as he left us alone, he

gave unmistakable signs of disgust that I should pay any attention to an old bore like this who had only come to beg.

I depended a great deal on Aung Net's judgment of his own people. I gave the hermit a packet of tea and a tin of milk, a tin of sardines (which I showed him how to open,) and a few rupees. Then I made it plain that it was time for him to go.

But to my surprise he was not interested in what I had given him. He wanted to talk.

" You are the first Thakin to come here since the one who died," he said. " He was buried over there." He pointed to the other side of the creek. " Where that large teak tree stands. It was a long while ago. I was a boy pupil at the monastery."

I could not help looking first at the flourishing teak tree and then at the languishing monastery. I was intrigued.

" Who was this Thakin? " I asked. I did not resent the packet of tea, the tin of milk, the sardines, and the few rupees, except that they seemed to make a little monument to my faulty judgment.

" Weren't you afraid to cross the Nat Sin ridge? " he asked.

" No," I said. " Why should I be? "

As I have said, I was prejudiced against this man. I thought that he was an ignorant fraud, living off the superstitions of the people. He certainly was ignorant, but he wasn't a fraud.

The story I gathered was this. Pya was a thriving village with plenty of huts and a large monastery until one day a young Forest Assistant staggered in, half dead from exposure, hunger, and malaria. Across his shoulders he carried a large black dog even feebler than himself.

The Thakin was taken into the monastery and nursed by the monks. They asked him what had happened and he told them how late one evening he had tried to shoot an elephant with enormous tusks. He wounded him and attempted to track him in the gathering night. He lost himself and could not find his way back to camp.

For a whole week he was without food. He had tried eating leaves and raw bamboo shoots. But his only companion, his dog, had found nothing to eat at all, and at the end of the week had collapsed.

The Thakin loved his dog. He left his rifle somewhere and took the dog over his shoulders, trusting that if he went down-stream long enough, he would find a village. And so he had staggered into Pya. But he did not long survive. And he was buried on the far side of the creek.

The dog, a black Labrador, recovered and lived for some time as the pet of the monastery. I had evidence of the truth of

this next morning. I saw quite a number of large black dogs with an obvious Labrador strain in them; and they were called "thimbawkwais," dogs which had come from overseas by steamship.

A short time after the death of the Thakin, a rogue elephant, an enormous tusker, appeared in the neighbourhood of Pya. Every night he savaged the crops and later when he had laid the fields waste, he started to tear down the village granaries and houses. The rumour spread that this animal was the same tusker whom the dead Thakin had wounded and he had come to take his revenge upon Pya.

The villagers were terrified. They had no firearms of any sort, to say nothing of a rifle with the calibre to kill an elephant. The monks and the villagers, men, women and children, pulled out with what possessions they could take, abandoning the village to the elephant and the bawdi bins, which soon came creeping with their waving arms and gripped the brick pagodas in their strangling embrace.

All this, said the hermit, had happened long ago. The elephant had died, but his spirit lingered on the Nat Sin ridge.

The hermit and the handful of villagers I had seen had only recently ventured back. They were still frightened that they might be attacked by the elephant's ghost. And this, he explained with a side-glance at the presents I had given him, was the reason why he had come to see me. We had passed over the Nat Sin ridge without harm, which seemed a good omen.

I told him that Pya should be in no danger of further attack.

He seemed relieved by my assurance.

"Could you, Thakin," he asked, "could you write a letter from the spirit of the dead Thakin, granting us peace in Pya, so that the others may return?"

I looked across the strangled village, picturing what it had been and could again become if the burden of fear was lifted from the people; and as I wrote the letter from the dead European whose name I did not know, I thought of how he must, God knows how many years before, have stood on exactly the same spot where I had stood the day before, sheltering between the buttresses of the bawdi bin from the electric storm, except that *he* had been lost and starving and with no companion but his black dog. The rifle must have been the last thing he had jettisoned.

Whether or not he had brought disaster to the village of Pya, they all thought that he had been responsible for the rogue elephant. Suddenly there came to me an idea of how to lay the ghost of the elephant on Nat Sin ridge; and before giving the hermit the letter I had written, I went into my tent and drew

the rusty old double-barrelled rifle from under my bed where it lay on my own rifle case.

I took it out to the hermit. "I found this at the base of Nat Sin ridge," I said. "This is the tha nat gyi of the Thakin who died. It was this which angered the spirits, because, as you know, tha nat gyi means 'the weapon which can kill even a spirit.' But now I have taken it away, they are at peace."

I tried to pass it to him, but he would not touch it. So I laid it on the table, beside the tea, the milk, the sardines, and the rupees. He looked at it from a distance and then he went away, taking with him only the letter which he had asked me to write. He was as old and wizened, dirty and poor as when he had come to me, but the only quality I noticed as he left was his dignity.

Late that night, alone with my thoughts, I picked up the rusty rifle. I had oiled the breech, hoping that it might eat through the rust; and once again I idly tried to break it. This time I succeeded and by the light of my two candles I peered at it. In each barrel was an empty shell.

It was the last link in the story. There below the escarpment, knowing that he was too weak to hunt any food, he had fired his two last shots in the hope that someone would hear and come to his aid.

I imagined him sitting there, with the black Labrador by his side, waiting and listening for the sounds of rescue. And then at last he knew that nobody would come. And so, I thought, he put the rifle in the shelter of the bawdi bin in case he survived and could go back for it.

Then I realised that this was wrong. If he had ever contemplated picking up that rifle again, he would have ejected the two empty shells. He left them up the spout in the hope that whoever found the rifle would understand what had happened. It was his last message.

A chill went down my spine as I realised it was meant for me.

© J. H. Williams 1960

★ *Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. Williams (Elephant Bill) spent twenty-five years in Burma training elephants and acquired what is probably a unique knowledge of their habits and temperaments. He was given his nickname by the Fourteenth Army's Elephant Corps which he commanded. He retired, with the O.B.E., and lived in Cornwall from 1945 until his death in 1958. His last book, In Quest of a Mermaid, is to be published by Rupert Hart-Davis.*

SILKEN PORTRAIT

Wu San put a finger to her red lips
in astonished delight

BY LESLIE BONNET

THE LADY LI shook her pale hand free of the flowing sleeve of her tunic and slipped the water-blue scarf of silk from her shoulders. Leaving it draped across the bench by her bed, where its gold-stitched borders glowed in the yellow light of the rape-oil lamps, she moved to the window and, opening one of the lattices, looked out over the sleeping city of Chengtu. The pulsing throb of slumbering myriads beat in her ears. A huge moon, round as a pomelo, hung in a black velvet sky between the city walls and the Great Snow Mountains beyond.

The Lady Li, whose personal names were Wu San, sighed and shut the lattice sharply. Her long tunic was apricot-coloured, embroidered with flowers and butterflies of mauve and yellow. Petulantly, she took it off. Standing then in the long white undergown, her slender, arched neck, the down-sloping shoulders revealed, she looked about her with that shadow of irritability on her exquisitely sculptured face. The room was a plain one, the solid bed, now lightly covered in this season of great heat, the bench beside it on which both scarf and tunic were tumbled in bright disarray, a table on the room's far side.

The walls bore only three long scrolls on which in fine calligraphy were inscribed laudatory greetings to Li Wang Chang, the Intendant of the Circuit for the Province of Szechewan, from separate scholars of especial distinction. These there were, hanging limp in the sultry air. And a lively picture, painted upon silk, of the divine Chu I.

The Intendant of the Circuit for the Province of Szechewan—a person of refined but not scholarly attainments—had gone to join his ancestors a year before this time. Although he had been in some ways an ornament to his office once he had attained it, he had had more than ordinary good fortune in satisfying the Examiner when as a young man he had aspired to the honour of official rank. He had therefore, to his credit, thereafter held this god in especial reverence. For Chu I, being one of those gods who concern themselves with the Imperial

Examinations, takes particular care of candidates who, because of inferior intellect or inadequate preparation, have little chance of success. He is known on occasion to have intervened and, with a nod to the Examiner, to have secured the acceptance of papers which on their strict merits might have been rejected. Because her late husband, Li Wang Chang, had made daily obeisance to this pictured god, the Lady Li had properly retained it in the chamber since his death.

It was not such a likeness of a man as would engender thoughts unsuitable to young widows. This Chu I was a man of ancient aspect and of short stature. A beaked nose, a ragged white beard, a shabby red gown with a green skirt tucked into his belt did nothing to offset his unimpressive physique.

Nevertheless, because he shared the bedchamber of the Lady Li—and perhaps because there was so little else there to look at—the lady did pay him more attention than he would ordinarily have deserved in such a situation. Indeed, so absurd are the fancies that thrive in idleness that she had several times of late, at the hour of preparing for bed, felt a strong conviction of an espying expression on the face of the divine Chu I, a twitch at the corner of the mouth, a glint in the eye, both of which disappeared at once if she looked severely at him.

So, on this night, as she drew the clinging white gown over her head she determined, being mischievously interested in this fancy, to make a trial of the matter. While the uplifting gown revealed the delicate " lily feet," close-shod in gay satin shoes, the dainty, caressing trousers of willow green, the pouting breasts, the lady's eyes were, of necessity, blinded. But when the gown had slipped over the shining black hair, piled high in such plenitude, gem-starred, she was able to give the picture a sharp look. Was it imagination, or had she really seen a grin freeze itself on the face of Chu I before his features composed themselves into their usual expression of earnest studiousness?

Sternly regarding the picture, the Lady Li let fall to the floor the little green trousers. She stood for moments, slick thighs jade-yellow in the soft light. Not even a flicker of emotion now disturbed the countenance of Chu I.

Wu San (one may now surely so refer to her without undue familiarity) shook her head in self-reproach at her silly fancies. Pit-pat, in only her tiny coloured shoes she swayed across the room and, bending, blew out two of the lamps that stood on the table. Then in the wan light of the one remaining lamp she glided, pale like a sleek fish in the amber Min river waters, across to her bed.

Lying there, thinly covered in the warm night, head neatly

supported on the wooden pillow, she smiled again. But, laugh at herself as she might, the disturbance caused by this impression about Chu I remained with her. For this was the first night since the death of her lord that Wu San had forgotten to weep.

Whether Wu San had wept these many months for the loss of the Intendant of the Circuit in the Province of Szechewan, or for something other than that is a question meet to be answered by young widows alone.

The departed Li Wang Chang had been all that a well-instructed girl had been led to expect that an elderly husband would be: strict in discipline, perfect in deportment, exquisite in tastes, and pleasures. Her one concern had been to give satisfaction in all things; and if, when gracing rather than sharing his bed, she had sometimes wondered what was the attraction of this preoccupation on which the Intendant spent so much time and effort, and ingenuity, it had only been to dismiss the dangerous thought and to resume diligently her tiresome tasks.

Now she slept, the faultless oval of her face turned a little towards the window so that a diffused moonlight outlined the parted lips and glinted on the long lashes that covered the upslanting eyes. The young man stood by the side of the bed, his eyes smarting with delight. He threw off his simple student's robe and tossed it atop the lady's glowing garments; and joined her. The response of Wu San was automatic; then enthusiastic. The head pillow clattered to the floor; the young man found himself straitly embraced.

It must have been at about the third watch of the night that Wu San, breathless but otherwise momentarily tranquil, bethought herself of the evident beardlessness of her partner. She passed a tender hand down a smooth cheek. She raised herself on one elbow and looked into a young and agreeable, but also exciting, and without doubt ardent, and demanding face. Years of obedience, brief hours of inclination combined to compel acquiescence.

A while later she drew apart again. "Who are you, sir?" she asked a little fearfully.

The young man looked up at her as she leaned timidly over him. He had a most engaging and shameless smile. "You may call me Chu I," he answered her.

Wu San laughed with relief and expectation. "So you were, in truth, smiling at me."

"Who would not?" he said fervently.

"But here? In this guise? How?"

"It is very simple. Because I committed some small irregularity in the Celestial Regions I am banished to Earth for some

short time. You will understand that the fault was not such as to reflect on my personal integrity, a mere technicality—" Wu San nodded comprehension. " And so, having again to take human form, and being familiar with this room—"

" But," interrupted Wu San, running her fingers through his hair, " you do not resemble the divine Chu I in any one particular; or is the portrait a bad one? "

" By no means," he said. " I have the power to assume any form which might be agreeable to me."

" Or to me," said Wu San impulsively. " You have without doubt selected a body for your purpose with the finest discrimination." Alas! These candid words inflamed her.

When peacefulness had returned so did inquisitiveness. " Pray forgive my ignorant questionings," begged Wu San, " but, unworthy as I am, I find it difficult to understand such a great personage having so fervent and ecstatic a disposition. Does not your greatness find such employments as these an embarrassment to a mind so long directed to study and the diffusion of rectifying influences? "

Her bedfellow smiled in a graciously condescending manner. " I have been idle upon that wall for many months," he said. " And there have been dire provocations."

Remembering her playful postures, Wu San lowered her eyes in respectful confusion.

Then she looked up—in sympathy. " For so long a time, imprisoned in the picture. . ." she said wonderingly. " Then how—? "

The visitor slipped out of the bed and stretched his muscular body. " Come," he commanded, grasping her lovingly by the hand.

Wu San rose, warm, pliant. He led her to where the portrait of Chu I had hung. Wu San started and trembled. Clear in the half light the portrait silk hung there, empty and white. Chu I had gone from out of it.

" Now I know—" cried Wu San, falling on her knees before him—" that this is indeed an auspicious visitation."

Not even a bent old man with a white beard could have regarded the sight of her kneeling loveliness unmoved.

Wu San was in a profound sleep when, as the sun's level rays touched the rooftops of Chengtu, she was left alone in her bed. There was the shadow of a smile still about her lips and on her face an expression of great refreshment. She awoke when the cicadas began to creak and twitter in the tall willows in the courtyard. She awoke smiling. Without waiting for the servants,

she got up, singing in a voice that sounded like the happy tinkle of rain on parched earth. Back on the silk was the picture of Chu I. Before it Wu San bowed profusely. And, before she would herself eat, a bowl of the choicest foods had to be placed at the foot of it.

It can be imagined how when at last night came again and it was time to disrobe, Wu San, for merriment, behaved in a somewhat teasing manner in the sight of the portrait of her auspicious visitant. After the manner of young women, being no longer startled, she became inquisitive about the extent of her attractiveness. She was not satisfied until she had persuaded herself that the cheeks in the picture had assumed a darkened and ensanguined hue. She put a finger to her red lips in astonished delight when she saw, or thought she saw, a bead of sweat tremble on the right temple of Chu I.

With the fullness of night there came again into the bed of Wu San the same impatient body of the acceptable young man. And these two had great joys together once more.

Now, this deferential narrator must make an avowal. Not to deceive for the sake of deceit, this young man was no incarnation of Chu I at all, but a student of modest means. Having, by chance, made a friend of the steward of the great lady's household in a wineshop; and being entertained by this same steward in the lady's house he had, unknown and by mischance, several times caught sight of Wu San. These glimpses had so powerfully affected him that he had sold his study books, and with the money had bribed the steward to allow him admittance to the house.

This perilous enterprise cannot be related in approving terms. The heads, at least, of the student and the steward were in hazard. The Lady Li was being grossly misled. And to the divine Chu I was being attributed a reputation for dalliance out of keeping with his honourable character, and beyond his powers. The name of this reckless lover was Chang Yu Yuan.

And so for many nights Wu San delighted in the embraces of the false Chu I; and for many days Yu Yuan neglected his studies and used his thoughts only in wishing for darkness to fall.

It must be related that Chang Yu Yuan had established and continued to maintain his impersonation of Chu I by an impudent stratagem. When he entered the chamber of the Lady Li, which he did each night when he was satisfied that she slept, he carried with him a plain piece of silk. This he hung up in the place of the portrait of the divinity and took into his gown the picture itself. When, just before morning, he left, he would hang up the picture again and retrieve his empty piece of silk.

The truth cannot be hidden. After some few happy weeks

Yu Yuan, at one dawn, dragged himself heavy with sleep from Wu San's side. Time pressed. Pale light was already flowing through the window lattice. In his haste he not only forgot to remove the blank piece of silk from the wall, he also left Chu I's portrait lying on the bench beside the bed.

When morning was fully come and the Lady Li discovered the proofs of the insolent fraud of which she had been a victim, her lips narrowed, her eyes lengthened with rage. To the servants she said not a word, mindful as she was, even in this pass, of her dignity. Eating nothing, drinking nothing, she paced her room waiting for night and the young man to return. She had hung on the wall again the picture of Chu I. The fine bowl and the portions of choice meats which had stood beneath it now lay scattered across the floor, kicked there by a pretty embroidered shoe. Chu I regarded her rage and the room's disorder with what looked like an expression of scandalised innocence.

The dark lid of night closed over the muttering city outside. No young man came, not on that night or on any other.

After a few days the Lady Li had discreet inquiries made for her assailant. She could not, for reasons of self-esteem, approach the Magistrate and have the rogue's likeness displayed at the city gates. Instead, she summoned persons of circumspection and indicated in prudent terms her wishes. But so difficult was it to be explicit without revealing the full facts that it is doubtful if these agents had a clear idea of what was required of them. Certain it is that the young man was not discovered by them at that time. This was more than partly due to the fact that Yu Yuan had left Chengtu.

Aware, as soon as he had reached his mean lodgings, of his mistake with the portrait, and unwilling to face the scorn and the vengeance of the Lady Li, Yu Yuan decided to depart. The choice was made easier by his remembrance that if he was to sit for the Imperial Examinations he would have to leave to make his way to the capital within at most a few days. He left Chengtu by the East Gate as soon as it was opened that morning.

Without doubt, Yu Yuan's journey to the capital was occasioned more by the wisdom of absenting himself from Chengtu than from any hope of success in the examinations. Unprepared as he was in the way of study, and distraught as he was by love and this parting from love, he lacked almost all of the characteristics of a successful candidate. Nor was it likely, as he was quick to appreciate, that the divine Chu I would be disposed to exert himself in his favour.

For five full seasons, summer passed, and winter fell, chill and dank, on the Szechewan plain.

Then a new spring began; the fragrance of the gwehwa blossom refreshed the air; wild-bright butterflies sported in pink peach trees. At the house of the Lady Li orderly ways had been restored. The portrait of Chu I had long been returned to honour. Rich offerings were continually being made to him. The Lady Li had learnt calmness from the painful passage of time. Her eyes were bigger, in a smaller face.

One came to her, bowing diligently.

"If it is the Great Lady's wish still to hear tidings of a certain matter—?"

"What matter is this?"

The visitor rolled his eyes in abasement. "There was a matter—" he ventured, "of a young man—"

The lady nodded, closed her eyes.

"There is a new Magistrate in the village of Ch'uan Chi, High-Born, some fifteen li along the way to Gwanhsien," the man said, letting out each word from his mouth with frightened care. "If the munificent lady were to inquire of him, we think—my associates and my mere self—his great name is Chang and his small names are Yu Yuan."

The lady dismissed him. "I will send for you again."

The sedan chair was called for.

With Wu San inside it biting her knuckles, the bearers set off at a scared trot. Before them ran two stout fellows wearing the badges of the Lady Li and grasping, each of them, a very wieldy staff.

The village of Ch'uan Chi lay strewn along the sides of the white road. In his poor yamen the new Magistrate received the lady. His cheeks, as he advanced bowing to greet her, paled. He looked up into her set face.

With an imperious movement she shut the door behind her, cutting off the sight of those two burly men of hers standing one on each side of it.

She laughed.

Yu Yuan looked at her stupidly, with new love.

"So, this—" said Wu San, indicating the mean room.

"It is more than my deserts," confessed Yu Yuan rightly. "This ignorant person undeservedly passed the Imperial Examinations." He hastened to add, "In a very lowly position on the list."

"Perhaps the divine Chu I came to your assistance," suggested Wu San.

The Magistrate's face darkened with embarrassment. He raised a protesting hand.

"I think I still have some influence with the impeccable Chu I. I begged him to help you, wherever you might be." She turned. "Is there perhaps a screen, Mr. Magistrate, which could be placed in front of this window to the street?"

There was.

The Lady Li went to the door. She spoke to her two guards.

"Keep at a distance any importunate litigants. My lord, your master, the Magistrate, has an accumulation of neglected duties with which to occupy himself."

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★ ★ ★

WATER PICTURE

In the pond in the park
all things are doubled:
Long buildings hang and
wriggle gently. Chimneys
are bent legs bouncing
on clouds below. A flag
wags like a fishhook
down there in the sky.

The arched stone bridge
is an eye, with underlid
in the water. In its lens
dip crinkled heads with hats
that don't fall off. Dogs go by,
barking on their backs.
A baby, taken to feed the
ducks, dangles upside-down,
a pink balloon for a buoy.

Treetops deploy a haze of
cherry bloom for roots,
where birds coast belly-up
in the glass bowl of a hill;
from its bottom a bunch
of peanut-munching children
are suspended by their
sneakers, waveringly.

A swan, with twin necks
forming the figure three,
steers between two dimpled
towers doubled. Fondly
hissing, she kisses herself,
and all the scene is troubled:
water-windows splinter,
tree-limbs tangle, the bridge
folds like a fan.

MAY SWENSON

FLESH-EATERS

He could see teeth in the jaws

BY BORDEN DEAL

MISS CULPEPPER had been hearing the shouting and the noise for some time before she became aware of it. She rose, then, and went towards the back of the big house just in time to see the bloody man run raggedly across the backyard and up on to the kitchen porch.

She watched him through the glass-panelled door in the hall as he ducked into the side room that opened off the porch. Beyond, at the far end of the empty field that stretched behind the house, she could see the black gesticulating dots of other men as they clustered and then broke away into individuals, fanning out across the field.

She stood for a moment, thoughtfully shifting her gaze between the closed door of the side room and the searching men in the field beyond. Then she turned and went back down the hall to her living-room. She paused for a moment beside the huge fish tank, looking at the five fish. The beautiful fish were moving in a slow restless hovering.

It was a very large tank for a home aquarium but there were only five fish. They were each about six inches long. She stared thoughtfully at the froth of bubbles that was putting the breath of oxygen into the water, and then she raised one hand to tap the heavy glass with her finger. The fish whirled, startled, and milled around the far side, and one of them passed through the life-giving bubbles. She smiled and went back to her desk, and began adding the new column of figures. She did not move until she heard the knock on the front door.

Miss Culpepper was the last of the Culpeppers, and she lived alone in the huge house. She was not a tall woman. Her flesh looked soft on her, though she was not fat, not even plump. Her lips were pale, flesh-coloured, and there was the beginning of a heavy dewlap on her rounded jaw. In the midst of her soft face the nose was harsh, strong, aristocratic. It was the Culpepper nose. She wore a shapeless cotton dress, and her black, pressed-straw hat lay rigidly ready in a chair beside the table, a pearl-knobbed hatpin sticking straight up out of the crown.

She had been expecting the knock. When it came she stood up and went towards the front door. The big entrance hall was completely bare, dusty, and spiders had spun webs in the corners. One bad winter, years ago, she had had to burn the furniture from this room in the living-room fireplace to keep warm.

She opened the door and looked at the tall young man standing there. He took off his hat and bowed slightly towards her.

"Miss Culpepper," he said. "I hate to bother you like this. But a man we're looking for came this way. Have you seen anything of him?"

Miss Culpepper looked at him, her face pleasant and interested. He was a tall young man, lean, and he wore the gun on his hip well. Miss Culpepper remembered he had looked that way as a boy, too. "Why no, Larry," she said. "I've been inside the house all day."

He shifted his hat in his hands. "If it's all right with you," he said apologetically, "we'd like to search your outbuildings. He's hurt, and he didn't get far. He must be around here . . ."

"Why, go right ahead," Miss Culpepper said. "Come on round to the back."

She herself went through the house. She stood on the back porch, watching while the men cautiously searched the old open garage that had not housed a car now for twenty years, the little playhouse where she had played so many hours as a little girl. They even went down into the storm cellar, though the wooden door was so rotted and broken that it was obvious no one had opened it and closed it again. While she watched, she listened for the sound of the hidden man's breathing only a few feet away from where she stood. She could not hear it.

At last Larry approached her, lifting his hat again. "Well," he said, "he must have gone on somewhere else. Sorry to trouble you, Miss Culpepper."

"No trouble at all, Larry," she said pleasantly.

He started away. Then he turned back. "If you see anything of him," he said, "call the sheriff's office right away." He looked round. "You'd better lock your doors tonight, Miss Culpepper. If he's still round here . . . He's a dangerous man. And he's hurt."

"What did he do?"

Larry's face hardened. "Last night he robbed a shop out in the country. He murdered the man who owned it. So you be careful, Miss Culpepper. Living alone like you do."

"I'll be careful," Miss Culpepper said steadily . . .

She watched the men cluster together and go away towards the front of the house. She waited until the sound of their

voices and their searching was gone completely. Then she patiently waited another five minutes. At last she moved, almost jerkily, and went to the side-room door.

"You can come out now," she said quietly. "They're gone."

There was a sudden startled flurry of motion in the room, like the fish in the tank when she tapped the glass, and then it stopped, bated, waiting. Her voice was impatient when she spoke again.

"It's safe now. Come on out of there."

The door began to move. Then it snatched open and he stood glaring at her, breathing hard. His face was wild and furious with the fright, and there was a hatchet gripped half-raised in his hand. It was her own hatchet, for splitting kindling wood, that she kept hanging on a nail in the room. He advanced towards her, his eyes white and glaring.

"Put that hatchet down!" she said. Her voice was sharp. "And come on into the house so I can do something about that bleeding."

He stopped, hesitating, uncertain. He half lowered the hatchet, watching her suspiciously. He looked like a wild animal with the blood and the dirt on him. He had only one shoe, and the narrow black jeans and white shirt he wore were caked with the blood and dirt and mud. His face was smeared, too, and he breathed heavily, spasmodically, panting as though he was running.

"What do you want?" he said hoarsely. "What are you . . ."

She turned her back on him, going to the kitchen door. "You're going to bleed to death if something isn't done," she said calmly. "Put that hatchet down."

Dumbly, he followed her into the kitchen. But he kept firm grip on his weapon. He stood watching her while she turned the hot-water tap on the kitchen sink and let it run. Then, cautiously, he took his eyes away from her and looked round the kitchen. It was very bare, the plaster smoked and cracked. There was a heavy round oak table with two chairs, and a very white and new electric stove. The refrigerator stood in an alcove formed from an outside stair that went to the second floor.

She came to him, gently took the hatchet out of his hand, and pressed him into a chair at the table. He let her do it, watching her while she unbuttoned the shirt and took it off. He looked at her soft face with the heavy, arrogant nose, so close as she leaned over him.

"Why didn't you tell them where I was?" he said.

"Don't worry about that now," she said briskly. She went back to the sink and wrung out the bloody washcloth. She turned round, looked at him again.

He was young, the flesh firm and strong on his bones. He had a hard, wary face, lined with fatigue and pain, and he did not seem to know how to stop panting. There were two wounds, one high and shallow in the meaty part under his right arm, the other on the side of his head, the ear mangled and torn by the bullet.

He submitted while she cleaned and bandaged them, acquiescent at last in his tiredness and pain. She worked efficiently, without hurry, sometimes even humming a faint tune between her teeth. She washed his upper body and, because her hands were soft and soothing on him, he began to feel lethargic, drowsy.

"Now," she said at last. "Get out of those trousers and finish bathing yourself. I'll get you some of Papa's old clothes to wear." She looked at him appraisingly. "They'll fit. Papa was a big man, too."

She went out of the room, leaving him alone. For a moment, he considered fleeing by the back door. But he thought of the men out there, still searching for him, and he knew that he had to stay. As long as she would let him. And then . . .

He stood up and shucked off the filthy, cheap jeans. The soft, warm rag felt good on his body as he scrubbed the dirt away. In the middle of his bathing, the door opened and her hand dropped a pair of trousers and a white shirt into the room. He finished and dressed in the clean clothing. It felt good on him, even though the trousers were too big at the waist and he had to tighten his belt to hold them up. She was waiting for him when he opened the door and led him without a word through the hallway to a bedroom. She pointed to the bed.

"Sleep," she said.

She left him alone again, and he sat down on the bed. Then he lay back with a deep sigh, in a new realisation of how completely tired he was. For a few minutes he fought the sleep away from him, and then he thought far back in his mind, *It can't be a trap. She could have given me to them at the very first. So it can't be a trap.* He sank away into soundless blackness with the thought, the tension and wariness going completely out of him. In the living-room, Miss Culpepper was feeding her fish. She smiled as she watched them fight over the food. Then she went back to her desk and continued her work.

It was night when he woke. He came awake instantly, like an animal, and then he oriented himself into awareness. He had stiffened up during the sleep; the whole side of his head felt numb and he had to move his right arm cautiously. He got up off the bed and opened the door into the hall, listening. The

house was silent, dark except for light seeping under the door leading to the living-room. He padded across the hall and stooped to the-keyhole. He could see only an empty stretch of room. He put his hand on the knob and turned it, slowly, feeling his heart thudding. He pushed the door back, screaking on its hinges. The room was empty.

He advanced into it, his head going warily from side to side. The room was like the kitchen, the plastered walls cracked and peeling. The furniture was old, scarred, the tapestried fabrics faded and colourless. A cluttered desk stood in one corner. There was a single light burning, near the fish tank, and the tank caught his eye. He went to it, stooping over it to look at the fish. They milled endlessly, sluggish, coasting one by one through the spray of bubbles. He heard the sound of a door and whirled. But it was only Miss Culpepper, coming in from outside through the empty entrance hall.

"Did you sleep well?" she said. She put up both hands, taking a long skewered hatpin out of the lacquered black straw, and putting the hat on a table.

"Yes," he said unwillingly. He kept on looking at her. He had to know. "Why did you save me from the men?"

She did not answer him. She came close to him, but it was only to look at the fish in the tank. He kept on staring at her. He could not judge her age. There was something very old in her careless untidiness, in the un-colour of her lips. But she was brisk in the movement of her body, as though she could not be more than forty-five or fifty.

She was still looking at the fish. "You're the first man who's set foot in this house in fifteen years," she said.

"You're taking a big chance," he said. "They'll come back when they don't find any trace of me farther on. They'll . . ."

She chuckled. "Don't worry about it. They wouldn't think of a man being in Miss Culpepper's house." She turned around, looking at him again. Her eyes went up to his face, came down his body in the old-fashioned trousers, the white collarless shirt, the shoes that did not fit well.

"Why did you kill that man?"

His voice was violent. "I didn't kill him. I had nothing to do with it."

He saw she didn't believe him. He felt his hands balling into fists, the violence of his voice seeping into his body.

There was something on her face that was not quite a smile. "Why were you running, then?"

"Listen," he said hoarsely. He touched her for the first time, gripping her arm hard. She did not move under his grasp.

"Listen. I'm a thief. I've been a thief all my life. But I wouldn't kill anybody. I couldn't."

"Then why . . .?"

"Listen," he said again. "I was released from prison last week. Those were prison clothes I was wearing. I was hitchhiking to Florida. When those deputies stopped me on the highway and arrested me I knew I didn't have a chance. There was a dead man, and an ex-convict in the county. It was my baby. So I broke and ran." He stopped, breathing hard. "When I burgle a place, I don't have to do any killing. I'm too good at it to need to do that."

She still did not move under his grip. "All right," she said. "So you didn't kill him."

"I wouldn't kill anybody," he said. He shuddered. "I'm nobody's angel. But killing . . ."

She moved, then. She went out from under his hand, taking a step away from him.

He tried to smile at her. The smile felt strange, unaccustomed, on his harsh face.

"I'm grateful to you," he said. "Not many women would have taken the chance you did. I'll move on, now that it's dark . . ."

"No," she said. "They're still looking for you. They'll kill you."

He turned round, looking at her. "You want me to stay?" His voice was surprised.

She smiled. It was a real smile this time, as tentative as his. "My father died fifteen years ago," she said. "I've been alone since then."

He looked at her sharply, but she had turned away towards the fish tank. "For a long time there was only me. But now I have my pets."

He leaned over to see them clearly. "I've never seen any fish like those," he said. "Most people keep those bright, pretty tropical fish. These are . . ."

He looked at them again. They were a blunt, chunky fish with an underslung jaw. He could see teeth in the jaws. The topside of the body was silver, an ordinary fish silver. But the underside was the colour of watered blood, as though it should stain off into the water. The eyes were cold, bulging, red-rimmed.

He thumped the side of the tank to make them swirl. "God, they're ugly."

"No," she said softly. "They're beautiful. They're lovely."

He put his hand over the edge of the tank, dabbled a finger

in the water. She snatched at his wrist as one of the fish rose towards him, breaking the surface in a sudden roil.

"Look out!" she said sharply. "He'll take your finger off."

She was gripping his wrist, holding his hand away from the water. He tried to pull out of her grasp but she was strong, very strong. He stopped, submitting.

"You're fooling me," he said. "No fish . . ."

She stared at him. "I'll show you," she said. She hurried towards the kitchen door. "And keep your hand out of that tank." He stood still, feeling very foolish, until she returned.

She was carrying a live mouse, pinched behind the neck with two fingers, and a butcher's knife in the other hand.

"I have a cage trap for them," she said. "That's one thing I've got—plenty of mice."

She leaned over the fish tank, carefully nicking the mouse with the knife until a drop of blood pearled redly into the water. Instantly the fish quickened in their swirl, their toothed jaws gaping. There was a roil of water. She dropped the live mouse into the tank with a sudden movement. He stared horrified at the moiling, snapping rush of the fish. The mouse was chopped to pieces, gone, in a matter of seconds. Blood swirled weakly in the water. The fish were frenzied.

"Good God!" he said. "Good God! What kind of . . ."

She laid one hand against the thick glass. One of the fish struck at it and whirled away, dazed by the force of its onrush against the glass. "They're piranhas," she said. "They come from South America. They're flesh-eaters."

"Ugly devils," he said, muttering the words, trying to choke down the rising horror. He could not take his eyes away from the tank, from the blunt, chunky, blood-bottomed fish.

"They're beautiful," she corrected him softly. "They're built for their job. Just look at those jaws, the teeth . . ." She looked at him again. "I feed them mice. I have to keep them well fed, or they'd eat each other."

"How did you get them?"

"I've always thought fish were slow and stupid things," she said. "Like most people. But I read about the piranhas, how if an animal gets into the water where they are, especially if there's blood, they'll strip it to the bone in a matter of minutes, no matter how big the animal, even a cow or a man. Then, later, I read that they're being imported into this country for tropical-fish fanciers. So I bought these. They're the only pets I've ever had."

She stirred out of her trance of looking. He was still caught by the terror of the six-inch fish.

"I guess you're hungry," she said. "I have some soup on the stove for you."

"No," he said. "No. I'm not hungry."

She smiled. It was almost a grin, and her eyes watched his face. "Your stomach will settle in a little while. Then you'll be hungry. How long since you ate?"

"I don't know," he said. "I don't remember. Yesterday . . ."

"You'll be hungry," she said. She looked fondly at the fish. "They're engines of destruction. They're teeth, and jaw, and muscle. They're the most perfect thing God ever made." She laughed softly. "The man I bought them from in New Orleans told me that when the natives down there want to torture a man, they gash blood out of him into the water. Then they stand him waist deep. He has to speak up fast if he wants to be lifted out in time." She kept on looking at him. "I imagine you'd even confess to that murder you didn't commit to avoid that, wouldn't you?"

He shuddered again. He stepped one step away from her. He could feel the panting rise up in his lungs again, smothering him. "What are you . . ."

Her laughter was pleasant, soothing. "I'm just talking," she said. "I was just thinking that our law enforcement officers could use these piranhas for third degree, instead of clumsy rubber hoses."

"I'd better go," he said abruptly. "It's dark now. I can travel far before daylight. Then . . ."

"No," she said sharply. "No. They'll kill you."

"I'm going," he said stubbornly. He was not hungry. He was rested, bandaged. But it was none of that. He just wanted to get away from the terrible fish, the flesh-eaters, and their strange owner.

There was a knock on the door. They both tensed into startled awareness.

"Quick," she whispered. "Into the cupboard."

She opened the door to a coat cupboard and he crammed in under an oilskin and a cloth coat that hung there. She shut the door and went through the entrance hall to the front door.

"Why, Larry!" she said. "I didn't expect you back. Are you still hunting that man?"

Larry took off his hat. "I just thought I'd better check back, Miss Culpepper," he said. "We haven't caught him yet, and I was afraid . . ."

She laughed. "No one would bother me, Larry. You don't have to worry about me."

He smiled. "Just making sure," he said. "Good night,

Miss Culpepper. And lock your doors. It's a dangerous man we're after—a killer."

She began swinging the door closed. "He's probably out of the county by now, Larry," she said. "He's probably gone for good."

"No," Larry said. "He couldn't have got through us completely. He's still here somewhere. And we'll find him. We've got half the men of the town out patrolling for him tonight. We'll flush him sooner or later."

"Are you sure he was the one who did the killing?"

"He was an ex-convict," Larry said. "I saw his prison clothes—the kind they give them when they turn them loose. Nobody in this county would do a thing like that, Miss Culpepper. It surely must be a stranger . . . an ex-con, a professional thief and killer."

"Yes, Larry," Miss Culpepper murmured. "Maybe so. Good night, Larry."

"If you need anything, just holler as loud as you can," Larry said. "We won't be far away."

Miss Culpepper closed the door. She waited, then came back to the living-room to open the cupboard door. "Did you hear?" she said. "You can't go anywhere. Come on now, and eat your soup."

He was hungry by the time he reached the table in the kitchen and he could barely wait until she put the steaming bowl before him. He ate hungrily, greedily, at first, and then he slowed down.

She was sitting across the table from him, watching him. Her eyes did not leave his face.

He finished, wiping the bottom of the bowl with a piece of bread. He felt better now, stronger, more assured.

"If I just had a cigarette," he said, with a sigh of content.

She took a packet out of her pocket and slid it across the table. "I thought you'd want some," she said. "I got them while you were asleep."

He lit up and sucked the smoke gratefully into his lungs. He studied her through the haze of cigarette smoke.

"I can't make you out," he said at last. "You're a part of this town. I can tell that from the way that guy Larry sounds when he talks to you. And yet . . ."

"My great-grandfather started this town," Miss Culpepper said. "Once we owned just about half the county." She looked around her. "This house was the showplace. It's got seventeen rooms, and every one of them was full, all the time. But it's all gone. Gone."

"The old southern family," he said, "gone to seed. And you're the last one."

She looked at him in surprise. "You know about that? You sound like an educated man, who's been to college and . . . Why are you a thief?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. I've been stealing all my life. When I was a kid, even. My family gave me up long ago." He straightened his shoulders. "My father was the best doctor in the town where I was born. But me—I'm the best burglar in the business."

They sat silently for a moment, across the table from each other. The light was on a drop-cord right over the table and the shadows were strong under their eyes and nostrils and cheek-bones. The walls of the room were leprous with peel and crack and rot.

"So you're the last," he said. "And it's all gone. You have the house, and this big wooded lot, and you live from hand to mouth in a way your ancestors never had to do. You make your own fires and cut your own wood, and you're proud and poor and shabby, and you keep thinking about how it was yesterday with your people. It's an old story."

She put a hand on the table. The fist was clenched, hard. "But there's a new chapter," she said. "I'm getting it back. All of it. Bit by bit, piece by piece. I'm getting it back." Her eyes were bold, hard, on his face. "Not many people know it. But I'm the richest woman in this town—and there's only one or two men who have more. I buy and sell land, I put money into businesses. I own one of the theatres, and half the newspaper, and about a third of the land my great-grandfather owned. And one of these days . . ."

He looked at her, and he did not believe it. He thought that she was, perhaps, even crazy. For she wore a shapeless dress, and lived in this old house that hadn't been repaired or painted for twenty years.

She saw he did not believe. She got up and went into the living-room. She came back with a tin box and spilt the contents on the table. There was money, green money, in stacks of tens and twenties and hundreds. There were papers, deeds, mortgages, stocks, and bonds. There was the glitter of hard white diamonds and the green warm glow of emeralds.

"I can show it to you, because you're a stranger," she said, her voice hard, pressing. "Nobody in this town knows I have these things. Oh, they see part of what I do, the businessmen know to come to me when they want money or advice. But they don't really know."

He stared down at the littered table. Then he lifted his eyes away from the wealth of possession. "You show it to me?" he said. "Knowing I'm a thief? That I . . ."

She laughed, harshly. "Where would you go?" she said. "You wouldn't get a quarter of a mile from my front door before they caught you."

"Yes," he said. "Yes. You're right about that."

She gathered up the documents and jewellery and money and stuffed them carefully into the tin box again. She took it into the living-room and, this time, he went with her. He kept his eyes averted from the fish tank.

"Then you don't have to live like this," he said. "Why didn't you ever get married? You didn't have to be the last of the Culpeppers. Maybe of the name, but the blood . . ."

Her mouth twisted. "Every man in this town from six years old to ninety tips his hat to me and calls me Miss Culpepper," she said. "Not one of them ever looked at me with lust in his mind. Not one of them ever thought of me as a woman. I'm just that odd old lady who lives alone in a big house . . ."

"But . . ." he said. "But you could have . . ."

"Bought?" she said scornfully. "Who wants a man you can buy?" She stopped. They both stopped. Their breathing was loud in the silence of the old house. "No," she said. "I'm not a woman to them. I'm Miss Culpepper, the last of the Culpepper line. I'm the old-maid Culpepper, that no man has ever looked at."

He was uncomfortable. He stood up and wandered restlessly near a curtained window, stooping to peer out into the darkness.

"They won't come here," she said. "You don't have to worry. No one ever comes here."

He straightened and came back into the room. He went to the tank and stooped over it, looking at the deadly fish. They swirled in slow waiting circles.

"I have another mouse in the cage," she said. "Do you want to feed them?"

Her voice was very close behind him, and he whirled round. "No," he said. "No!"

Her voice crooned. "Such lovely pets. Such deadly, lovely pets." She had come closer to him. Now she stepped away, her head averted. "It's getting late," she said. "We better be getting to sleep. They'll be suspicious if I keep the lights on past my usual time."

He was relieved. "Where do you want me to sleep?" he said. "In the same bedroom?"

She did not answer. He looked at her. And he knew. She

answered the look. She stood before him, shapeless in the old cotton dress, and she appeared the same. But her face was changed, different. It was softer, receiving, and at the same time harder than before.

"It's time for you to kiss me now," she said, her voice a throaty murmur he could scarcely hear.

"Wait a minute . . ." he said. She came closer. She put her arms around his waist, standing close against him.

"For fifteen years," she said, "there hasn't been a man in this house. Isn't that reason enough? Kiss me. Now!"

His blood was stirred, in spite of himself. He wondered how she looked under the cotton dress. She was not old. There was age in her, but also a youthfulness apparent in her vigour and firmness. And he had been a long time in prison.

He bent his head and she put her lips against his. They were soft, the strangest-tasting lips he had ever kissed, soft and the colour of flesh, for she had never worn lipstick. But they were alive. He felt her whole length of body quiver against him, shuddering, and she put her hands on the sides of his neck, holding him.

At last he pulled away. She was breathing hard, the breath harsh in the room, and her hands clung to his flesh.

"You'll stay with me," she said, her voice soft, and hard at the same time. "You'll never go away. *They* will be my killers, and you will be my thief."

"Wait a minute," he said, swimming up out of the clutch of her nearness. "Wait a minute. I can't stay here for ever. I can't . . ."

"Yes," she said. "You can't go out there. They'll kill you."

He drew away from her. He was feeling the horror again. "You mean . . . never to put my foot outside the door. To be shut in, day after day, week after week, month after month. To be hidden . . ."

"You won't have to do anything," she said. "I can do all that. I can handle myself in that world out there, just like a man. But at home . . ."

"No," he said harshly. "No."

She stopped. She regarded him. "All right," she said. "Go on. Go on out there. Die!"

She came close to him when she saw the uncertainty, the hesitation. "You've been in prison a long time," she said. She touched him. "You need me, too."

He was drowned again. She touched him with her hands, her flesh warm and alive through the thin shirt, and her mouth was waiting. She groaned as he kissed her, and her lips were writhing.

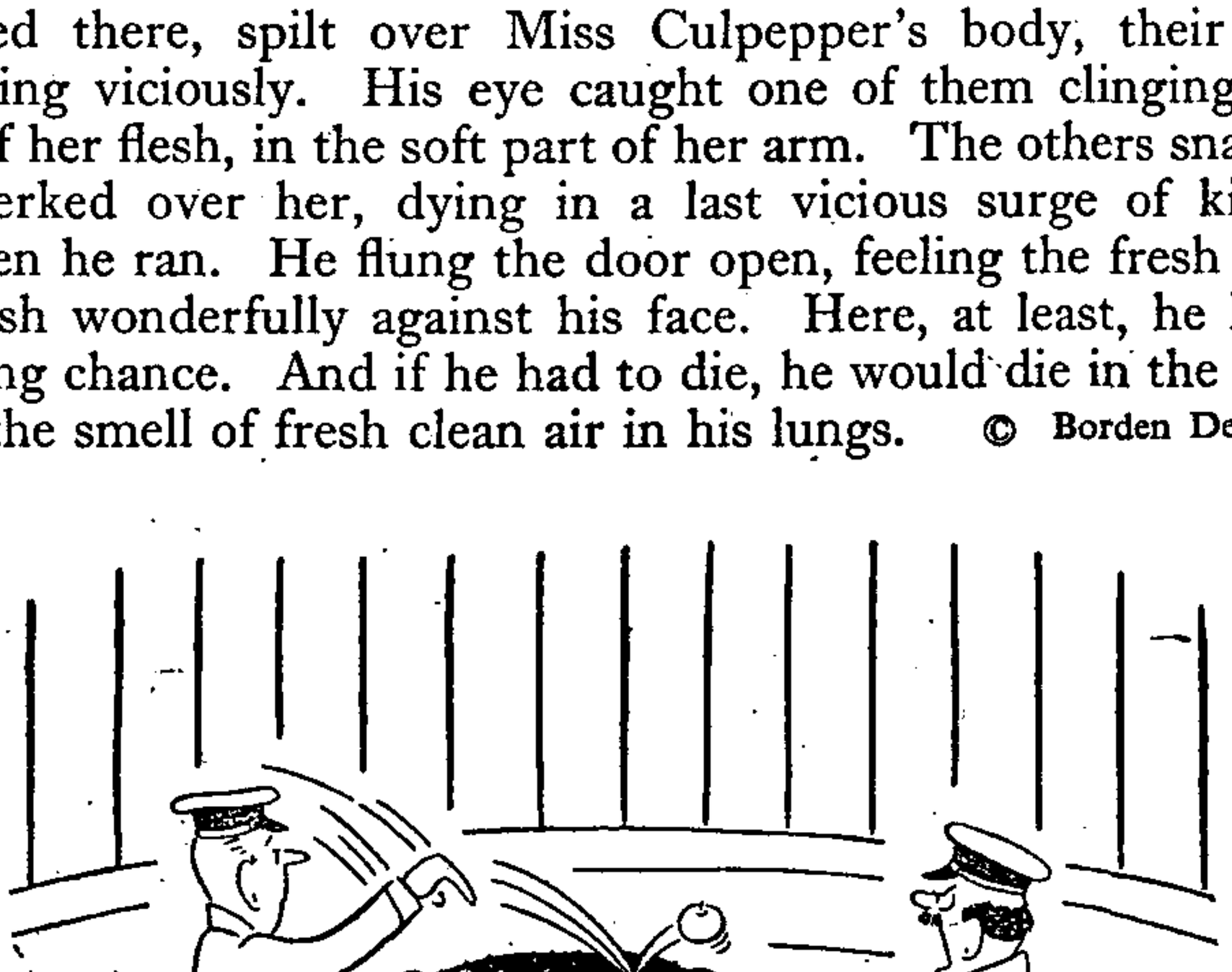
He felt the bite of her teeth on his lower lip, hard and hurting and good.

He tightened his shoulders, feeling it drowning in him. He brought up his hands to her waist, holding her. Then they moved upwards again and he was holding her struggling away from him. There was the taste of blood in his mouth and his hands were on her throat, and her eyes were bulging out of her head, and she was trying to say something. He stared in terror as his hands did the job, as they held on and held on against her struggle and moaning, as her hands clawed at his own, until she had gone limp.

Then he dropped her on the floor. He stared down at her crumpled body. "I'm not a killer," he said. "I'm not. I'm not a killer."

He whirled to run. The tank, bright with light from the lamp, caught his eye. He ran back to it and shoved at it, dumping the water and the vicious little six-inch killers on the floor. They writhed there, spilt over Miss Culpepper's body, their jaws snapping viciously. His eye caught one of them clinging to a fold of her flesh, in the soft part of her arm. The others snapped and jerked over her, dying in a last vicious surge of killing.

Then he ran. He flung the door open, feeling the fresh night air rush wonderfully against his face. Here, at least, he had a running chance. And if he had to die, he would die in the open, with the smell of fresh clean air in his lungs. © Borden Deal 1960



" That, Ferguson, is inexcusable."

Song of Love

He did not cease; but cooed—and cooed;
And somewhat pensively he wooed.

Tom sang for joy and Ned sang for joy and old Sam sang for joy;
All we four boys piped up loud, just like one boy;
And the ladies that sate with the Squire—their cheeks were all wet,
For the noise of the voice of us boys, when we sang our Quartette.

Tom he piped low and Ned he piped low and old Sam he piped low;
Into a sorrowful fall did our music flow;
And the ladies that sate with the Squire vowed they'd never forget
How the eyes of them cried for delight, when we sang our Quartette.

WALTER DE LA MARE, *The Quartette*

Troubadour

I took the scarf from her head and loosened the fair hair so that it fell to her shoulders and clung about her neck . . . She did not turn round to face me, but said in a voice that was suddenly low but very young, " No one has ever said anything to me like that. No one has been gentle. No one ever."

I bent my head to kiss her shoulder and bury my head in her tumbled hair.

"And you came to sing to me," she said . . .

And I cannot tell how we were lovers. How when the night had come to blanket the glass roof, we made a fire and sat on the rug beside it. How I soothed her hair and sang her old songs. And how, when the sky cleared and the night limped away from the chimneys like a slinking ebony cat, I left her sleeping with one slim arm lying across the shallow dip that my body had left, and with the tired smile of a dreaming girl who has danced all through the night.

BEVERLEY CROSS, *The Nightwalkers*

Sweet and Stiff

Treacle make my voice so sweet
Fit to sing at de Judgment Seat,
Drinking treacle, drinking rum,
Singing to de Lawd till Kingdom Come.

Treacle make my voice so clear
All de darkiès come to hear,
Drinking treacle, drinking rum,
Dat's what for de darkies come.

ANGELA THIRKELL, *Wild Strawberries*

Last Rose of Summer

" He was proud of me then. I could make him laugh.

' Nance, you're a killer,' he'd say. He used to sit on the doorstep quite helpless with giggles at the stories and things I told him. He admired me too, he admired my looks, he really loved me, you know.

' Come on, Nance,' he'd say. ' Take out your pins. Let your hair down—let's see it shine! '

He loved my hair; it had gold lights in it then and it hung right down my back. So I'd sit in the window and shake it over my shoulders—it was so heavy you wouldn't believe—and he'd twist and arrange it so that it caught the sun, and then sit and just gaze and gaze . . .

" Sometimes, when you children were all in bed, he'd clear all his books away—' Come on, Nance,' he'd say, ' I've had enough of them. Come and sing us a song! ' We'd go to the piano, and I'd sit on his lap, and he'd play with his arms round me. And I'd sing him ' Killarney ' and ' Only a Rose.' They were both his favourites then . . ."

LAURIE LEE, *Cider With Rosie*

Rustic Ditty

She began to sing and to work to the rhythm of her singing . . . The song she sang was a little plaintive and more than a little bawdy; all about a lass who had loved a soldier who had marched away to the wars and never come back, though he had left a pledge behind him . . . Behind her the field was brown from its recent ploughing, and against the sombre colour of it the scarlet of her shawl, which she had pushed from her hair and knotted loosely on her breast, the soft buff of her sacking apron, the bright golden-brown of her short close curls, the fading tan and the gathering carnation of her face made a picture which fell upon the eye as a symphony might fall upon the ear.

It was so that Francis Loveless first saw her.

NORAH LOFTS, *To See a Fine Lady*

Highland Air

Whate'er the theme, the maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending;
I listen'd, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, *The Solitary Reaper*

Tender Chord

And Babs began to sing " Plaisir d'Amour."

" *Plaisir d'amour ne dure qu'un moment . . .*"

She sang it carefully and well, with as little understanding of the actual meaning as a choirboy singing of Hell. Her hands clasped behind her, her head raised a little, her voice pure and clear: " *Chagrin d'amour qure toute la vie . . .*"

Letti cried a little, remembering her husband Adrien, and his romantic courtship and their all too brief honeymoon . . . And Etienne remembered how he had first fallen in love with Camille; when he saw her, fair and fresh as the scent of lemons on an Italian wall, playing the harp . . . And Nicholas fell deeply in love with Babs, fell in love with her in the way that so many of the men of his family had fallen in love: " That one and no other! "

G. B. STERN, *The Young Matriarch*

A SKULL FOR A HALFPENNY

" Is it me or the money you'd miss? " he asked

BY WALTER MACKEN

MY HEART nearly stopped beating when I saw him.

It was market day in the town, and they had set up stalls where men were auctioning off cheap clothes that you could wear-as-you-pay and there were vans selling fish and chips and stalls with jewellery and things like that. It was none of those made me pause but the man standing on the box sending a stream of things rising into the air in front of his face from one hand to the other, plates and coloured balls.

He was a tall man with long hands. I was too far away to hear what he was saying, but I closed on the laughing crowd that surrounded him to get a better look at his face. Maybe, I thought, it is he. I knew it couldn't be but it had always been like this. I always seem to be searching for him, hoping, and as I moved in now towards this juggler the years seemed to fall away from me; my hair was no longer grey but brown and unruly and needing to be clipped. Sometimes it is easy to shed the weary years.

For I was young when I first met him. I remember we had all enjoyed our First Holy Communion Day a little while back and the loot we had gathered from relations and weeping sentimental women had become exhausted. It must have been summer, too, because we had discarded our shoes and stockings. I can still feel the heat of the pavements under my bare feet.

These pavements were in the poorer part of the town; long streets of houses all joined together, with doors opening on to footpaths and economically lighted with one wooden lamp-post in the middle of everything.

There was Jojo and Vincent and Daneen and myself, Tony, and it's funny how you can remember a conversation at a particular time. We were discussing where babies came from. We were doing this seriously so it will show you how much sense we had.

Daneen, who seemed to know more than the rest of us, adopted a horribly superior air, sitting on the pavement, looking knowingly

out of the corner of his eye, humming and playing ceaselessly with jackstones. Now and again he would say, " Oh, you poor ignorant children! " until we were becoming sick of him and thinking of attacking him, and we would have, but our eyes were attracted to the fellow at the lamp-post.

He had been there some time, but we had paid little attention to him. We found adults boring, and apart from mimicking a street singer, or pelting him with cabbage stalks if he was a poor singer, we never allowed them to interfere with us.

But this fellow was doing something odd. He had about six fist-sized rocks and he was throwing them into the air one after another, juggling with them, sometimes lifting a leg and juggling the rocks with his leg held up. He looked funny. Then he added a good orange to the stones and an apple, and an apple and another orange until he had four fruit and two rocks describing an unceasing circle.

" Look at the gawk," Vincent said.

" Them's real oranges," said Jojo.

" He's not bad," said Daneen.

" Hard apples too," I said.

" We'll go and look at him," said Daneen, rising from the ground.

We walked over to him.

He was a tall skinny fellow wearing poor clothes. You could see his feet through his boots. His hair was dark and tangled and he was unshaven, but I noticed that his eyes were very blue and that his teeth were very white. You don't notice things like this about beggarmen generally. Also when you approach them you do so from the windward side because they smell of sleeping-out and unwashed clothes, but strangely enough this one smelt clean, so you could go nearer to him.

We ringed him but he remained unperturbed. His eyes crinkled. Suddenly one after another the fruit flew towards us and we were quick in catching our share.

He leaned against the pole and looked at us. He pointed a finger at us.

" Pixie," he said to Jojo; " Whitey," to Vincent; " Pugnose," to Daneen; and " Skinny," to me. We were eating so we didn't mind. But all the same it was apt names he put on the lot of us.

I thought he was unusual, so between bites I asked, " Who are you? "

" I am the Conjugator," he said. " I juggle and I conjure. Watch! " He made movements with his hands and almost as soon as you could say it he had taken a penny from Jojo's nose, a penny from Vincent's head, a penny from the bottom of Daneen's

trousers, and lifting my bare foot from the dust there was a penny under it!

We laughed. He was good. You couldn't spot him at it.

Then he juggled with the pennies. "Do you want those pennies?" he asked.

We looked at one another. Pennies weren't so easily acquired in those times.

"Do you want to drown a dog?" asked Daneen.

The Conjugator laughed. "I want information," he said, "I just want to know all the soft touches in the street. A bargain?"

We thought it over. Not for long. We held out our hands and he put the warm pennies in them and we sat on the road around him. We pointed out the soft-touch houses, including our own, which was a betrayal in a way. We just left in one or two old cranks because we wanted a laugh as well.

"Stout men," he said. "If I return to work these streets I will always consult you before my rounds." He mooched at his clothes and a small square package appeared which he pulled at until it opened out into a sort of canvas tray. It contained ribbons and beads and gewgaws, just an excuse for begging. He was cute, you see, bribing us like that beforehand, because I suppose he knew we could make life hell for him while he was on his rounds.

So he winked at us and started.

We sat at the corner watching. He was a charmer. You would see the angry face of the woman disturbed at her work and as he talked you would see the anger melting, her face softening, until finally she would go back into the kitchen for her purse. He was a good worker. He skipped the doors we told him to skip. But all the time he was drawing close to the door of the Great Crank and we were chuckling inside with glee. We encouraged him with nods.

So he knocked at this door and the little dark-faced man appeared. He looked at the pedlar, listened to him, appearing quite amiable, then he retired and came back again waving a big blackthorn stick which he swung straight away.

The Conjugator was nimble, but all the same he got a few great whacks on the back before his running speed outdistanced the reach of the stick. The Crank stood roaring after him, cursing and shouting until he went home and banged the door. Really, it would make a cat laugh.

We weren't afraid of the Conjugator. After all we were four to one, and if we didn't wish it he couldn't be in the street at all, so we sauntered to the corner where he was sheltering.

"Aren't ye great little bastards?" he asked us.

"We forgot him," said Daneen.

"You did like hell," said the Conjugator. "Is that a fair way to act?"

"Let everything calm down and start again," I said.

"Are there many more like him?" he asked.

"No," I said innocently. There were only two more. He sighed and produced four more pennies.

"How many?" he asked.

Glad of his intelligence, we took the pennies and told him the two houses to dodge.

Then we went off and spent the money.

We saw him several times after that. He would seek us out, sit with us, and pretend to conjure pennies from our persons. We got to like him. He didn't talk big, like. He could have been one of ourselves. He took an interest in us, now that he was getting into our houses. He knew our mothers. Yours is the tall one and yours is the dark one and yours is the fair one and yours is the small one. We told him about our families, our brothers and sisters and how unfair our fathers were to us at times. All that.

I forgot to mention that at this time there was a sort of war going on. Arrests and shootings and raids and things, but when you are that young these things don't leave much of an impression on you.

All I remember was the terror that came over me in the middle of the night when the lorries came thundering into the street and we were all dragged out of our beds and had to stand in the kitchen while big frightening fellows with black guns in their hands searched our houses. That's the most I remember, the black guns, and the rest seemed just a nightmare you would have after going to sleep sometimes.

We talked about these things to the Conjugator and Daneen gleefully told about how his brother was up on the roof the last time, how he got out of a window and pulled himself up by the guttering.

The Conjugator praised that and said how clever it was, but unfortunately the next time they came they got Daneen's brother, because they searched the roof. It was the only time I ever saw Daneen crying and the Conjugator patted his back and told him not to worry that everything would be all right and conjured sweets out of his pocket. They were odd times all right. Jojo's father had a rifle hidden up the chimney and they got that too and gave him a bit of a going over with Jojo's mother watching before they took him away. That was hard on Jojo as you can imagine. But I thought the Conjugator was very kind to him and

seemed really sad about it because there were creases between his eyes.

Something odd happened then. My brother Joe was a big fellow. He wasn't skinny like me. He was well filled out. He was in some sort of a job that kept him away from home a lot, selling things or something I supposed, and I remember this incident was the beginning of the end of the whole affair.

It was late evening. The sun was low in the sky and soon we would have to be off the streets. There was a curfew and you couldn't be on the streets without a pass, and you had to have lights out in the house or if you didn't they were liable to send a bullet through the window to remind you.

"The place is getting spun out for me," the Conjugator was saying. "Soon I won't even be able to make the bribe money that I pay you men. Today I only got elevenpence. So my profit is only sevenpence. How am I expected to live on that?"

We were a bit dismayed. "Ah, don't give up for a while," I said. "You can cut the bribe money to a halfpenny a skull until times get better. We'd miss you now if you went."

"Is it me or the money you'd miss?" he asked.

We thought this over. It was a serious question.

"Ah, we like you," I said. "Is that right, fellas?"

They thought it over. Daneen was chewing a bit of stick. He spat it out. "Arrah, don't go away so soon," he said, for them.

They meant this too. I never saw anyone they had taken to like the Conjugator. He rose to his feet.

"Sometimes the nearest and dearest must part," he said. "Look, Skinny, come with me a minute. I want you." He walked me aside. His hand was tensed on my arm. He was hurting me. "I tell you something," he said. "You do what I say, and don't say who."

This was mysterious.

"What's up with you?" I asked.

"I don't honestly know what's up with me," he said. "Listen, tell your brother Joe not to be home tonight. Just that. That's all." He waved to the others and went away, his tattered trousers flapping round his legs.

"What did he want, Skinny?" I was asked. "What was the secret?"

"Ah, nothing, nothing!" I said. "Come on and we'll race round the avenue before curfew." And I set off, having a good start because I thought of it first, but I was worried.

Joe wasn't home. Maybe he wouldn't come home at all, I thought. I was restless. My mother was chiding me. Can't you sit quiet? What's got into you? Why didn't you eat your bread

and dripping? I like bread and dripping. I don't know why I couldn't eat it then.

I was in bed when Joe came home. I heard him downstairs, so I ran down in my shirt and I shouted into the dimly-lighted kitchen, "Joe! Joe! Go away! Don't stay home! Please don't stay home!" I can still see him, his eyes wide, staring at me.

"Go back to bed, Tony," he said then, pulling on his coat.

My mother was standing there with her hand on her heart, but Joe was on the way out the back door. He could have hardly got out when the butts of guns were banging on the front door and I was up in bed with the blankets pulled over my head and my heart thumping.

So they didn't find him, but you can see how the trouble started. Joe was waiting for me one day when I was coming home from school. He pulled me into a quiet way by the canal.

"Now, Tony," he said. "Who told you to tell me to go?"

It never entered my head to say anything but what I said.

"Why, the Conjugator," I said. "Wasn't he good? If it wasn't for him they would have caught you."

"Who is the Conjugator, Tony?" he asked me.

I told him about the Conjugator, what a massive juggler he was and a super conjurer.

"When do you expect him back to the street?" he asked. "I'd like to meet him too."

"Oh, that's great, Joe," I said. "You'll love him. He's a nice fellow and he usually comes on the second Saturday."

Then he gave me messages for my mother and we parted.

The Conjugator came back.

I thought he looked sad that day, tell you the truth. He looked around him a lot. He didn't seem at ease. But there were only the four of us in the street, sitting as usual at the lamp-post, so he came over to us, and got on his knees and started the business with the pennies. But he wasn't smiling. He had only conjured three pennies when we suddenly noticed the legs of men around us. I didn't know them but they had hard faces. They would frighten you somehow. None of them was Joe. I was wondering why Joe didn't come to meet the Conjugator. One of them said, "Get up!"

I saw the face of the Conjugator going white in front of my eyes as he rose to his feet. Then he smiled. I saw his long hands fumbling and then they simply spouted pennies all around us; falling all around us in the dust like heavy raindrops.

"I have to go, fellas," he said. "Good-bye. Don't forget to spend the pennies for me."

They walked away one on each side of him and one at his back.

I started up. The pennies didn't seem to matter somehow. I wanted to call out after him, " Hey, thanks for Joe. You were right about Joe! "

But I didn't call. I didn't do anything because I was afraid of these men, dressed like ordinary men, but their faces were tight and I didn't know them.

I thought then, that maybe they were friends of the Conjugator. I walked a little after them.

Before they turned the corner the Conjugator waved his hand at me. That's what I remember so well, the long thin hands and the white teeth in his face. And then he was gone. I felt odd and lonely.

So a few days later when Daneen said, " Did you hear? They shot the Conjugator. It's in the papers. Hey, fellas, did ye hear, they shot the Conjugator! " I wouldn't believe them. Jojo had even seen him, in a street away from ours and he had a card-board round his neck with the word on it. I couldn't believe it.

" But I saw him," said Jojo. " There was a hole in his head. There was! There was! My mother nearly kilt me for looking at him."

We spelt out the bit in the papers about an apparent itinerant and the mystery of his death, but I found it hard to believe. I still find it hard to believe it. I seem to be always looking for him.

That's why I went towards this juggler now, in case it might be he. Because whatever about him, if he died and it was he, he died from a good act. That's what troubles me. He saved my brother Joe. If he said nothing, who would have known about him? If I said nothing about him, who would have known about him? So it was me, in a way, that was responsible. Maybe that's why I am looking for him.

This fellow now wasn't he. He had black greasy hair and bad yellow teeth and there was a smell off his clothes. The Conjugator would never have had a smell off his clothes.

So I walked away from this one. I suppose that is what I will always do when I see a juggler. I will draw close to him in the hope that he will be the Conjugator, even though I know in my heart he could never be he.

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ENOUGH TO MAKE YOUR HAIR CURL

A tabloid is a newspaper with a permanent crime wave.

A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

THE BATTLE OF BANK STREET

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

"I HOPE," said Miss Postance coldly, "that you're not going to suggest that Ronald is really a fifty-year-old man, or a girl, or a pair of Siamese twins, perhaps."

Miss Postance was the Assistant Probation Officer at Kennington. She was only twenty-three, an age of great natural intolerance, and she was particularly severe with Detective Inspector Patrick Petrella, who had recently behaved quite unforgivably by concealing the fact that two of her protégés, whom she believed to be fifteen-year-old boys, were really a Polish safe-breaker and his wife.

"No," said Petrella. "There's no mystery about Ronald. His mother lives in The Cut. Hop-picking in the summer, and rag-picking in the winter. His father is thought to have been a plate-layer on the railway, but there's never been much certainty about that. Ronald's eighteen now, isn't he?"

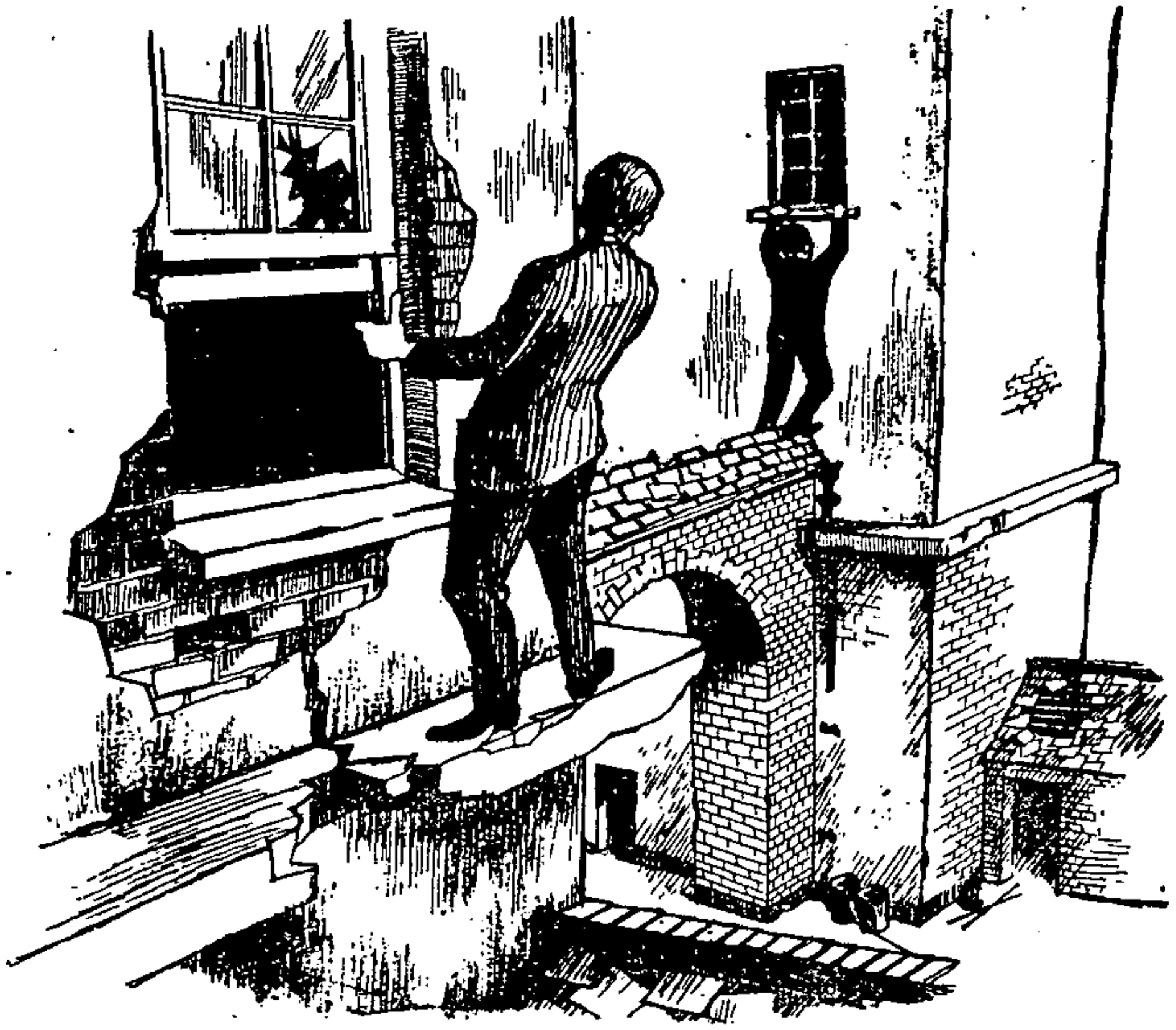
"He'll be nineteen next Tuesday," said Miss Postance. "That's his birthday. Let's hope he can keep out of trouble till then."

"We'll all do our best."

"Mentally, he's only about twelve years old."

"He may be mentally twelve," said Petrella. "The trouble is that physically he's his full age and a bit more besides. However, I promise you that if he'll keep out of our way, we'll try to keep out of his."

Ronald Hart was something of a thorn in the flesh of X Division. He was a tall strongly-made young man, with thick black hair, a pleasant if rather vacant face, and a full complement of his putative father's muscles; and he appeared to have objections to work in any form. This programme of planned leisure left him



with a balance of energy which he expended in tearing down advertisement hoardings, dismantling telephone booths, wrecking street lamps and, when all else failed, fighting with his disreputable friends. But on the whole, he only fought when he was drunk. Sober, Ronald was an easy-going person.

"I hope he can," said Miss Postance. "I do believe he's really trying now. He went to the cinema the other afternoon and sat right through the film. He didn't cut up any of the seats, either."

"Talking of cinemas, there's a very good film on at the Columbia. I wondered if this evening—"

"I'm not sure if I can manage this evening. I've got a lot of reports to write."

"Hang reports," said Petrella. "This is a gangster film. It'll cheer both of us up to see how much worse things are in America."

"Well, I might," said Miss Postance. "*If* I don't get any more callers between now and five o'clock, and *if* the Chief Probation Officer doesn't ring up, and *if* I can get through about half a dozen case reports."

"I'll take a chance on that," said Petrella. "If you find you can't turn up, I can always go by myself."

"Supposing something prevents *you* turning up?"

" It won't," said Petrella. " But if it does, I'll telephone you."

In the light of this promise, Miss Postance was understandably put out when Petrella failed to arrive at the appointed rendezvous. She waited, with growing displeasure, for half an hour. She then swallowed her pride and telephoned Gabriel Street Station, only to get a " line engaged " signal. When this had happened twice she telephoned his rooms, and Mrs. Wetherall, who answered the telephone, said that he hadn't returned there either. So she telephoned the police station again, and for the third time got the engaged signal.

At twenty to seven that evening Sergeant Lake had been waiting near the corner of Upper Dock Street and Gosforth Road. He was waiting for Police Constable Bates, who was due to make a point with him after patrolling the warehouse area which lies between Gosforth Road, Lower Dock Street, and the river. It was not the first time that Bates had been late at a point, and Sergeant Lake spent the first five minutes thinking out and stringing together a few of the things he intended to say to his subordinate. When a full five minutes had passed, he began to feel a prickle of uneasiness. He started slowly down Gosforth Road in the direction in which Bates was to come.

He had passed the third turning, a dark alley called Parker's Passage, which dived steeply from Gosforth Road to the river, when he heard something. It was a low sighing noise, between a muttering and a groan, and it came from inside the mouth of the alley. He switched on his belt torch, and saw Constable Bates lying face downwards. For a moment he thought that he was drunk. Then he saw the dark pool of blood . . .

Superintendent Benjamin reached Gabriel Street with Chief Superintendent Thom, who was in command of all detective forces in No. 4 District.

Petrella said, " I can give you what we've got, sir. Bates was shot once through the chest at pretty close quarters with a medium calibre gun of some sort. He couldn't have reached Parker's Passage before twenty-five to seven. Sergeant Lake got to the crossroads at twenty to seven. There was a lot of traffic, but he's quite sure he'd have heard a shot."

" Gosforth Road," said Benjamin. " That's warehouses, marine stores, small factories, workshops. That sort of thing. We'll cordon it until daylight—just in case."

Both men knew what was in his mind.

" I've got all the men I could lay hands on round it now," said Petrella. " And three cars are patrolling. If there's anyone still in there, they won't get out easily."

"Was there any sign of breaking and entering?" said Benjamin.

"Bates saw *something*," said Petrella. "His whistle was actually in his hand when he was shot. But he didn't have time to use it."

Benjamin said, "I'll send reinforcements and reliefs from M Division right away. We'll keep the blockade up till first light, and then go in and give it a proper going-over."

At six o'clock on the following morning, Petrella, moving cautiously down the alley, tripped over a raised grating. Normally flush with the ground, it was now lying awkwardly askew. Closer inspection showed that the padlock had been twisted off and the retaining bolt drawn.

Petrella lifted the grating and lowered himself into the black pit. Ahead of him was a double wooden door. There were signs of forcing here, too. One of the doors was hanging loose.

Petrella said to Sergeant Morris, who was breathing down the back of his neck, "Hop up and see who this outfit belongs to. It's all right. I'm not going in till you get back. I'm not feeling heroic this morning."

"Silverstone Marine Limited," reported Sergeant Morris. "Big outfit. Makes motor engines and such like."

"All right," said Petrella. "Watch it." He kicked open the door, dropped on to one knee, and clicked on his torch. Nothing happened. Ahead of him was a basement storeroom, full of what looked like heavy machinery, some crated, some loose.

"Awkward things to steal," said Petrella. "My guess is they just used this as a way in."

A few minutes later he and Sergeant Morris were in the office. This was in good order too, except that the tall green-and-gold safe had been lowered face downwards on to a rolled-up carpet, and a circular hole had been cut in its back.

When Petrella reached Gabriel Street with the news, Superintendent Benjamin was finishing a telephone call. He sat there, in the uncharitable light of early morning, saying, "Yes, I see," and then, "I'm sure you did everything you could." There was a grey stubble round the fringes of his lined, bleak face. Petrella guessed what he was going to say before he opened his mouth.

"Bates died in hospital ten minutes ago. He didn't recover consciousness."

Petrella had nothing to say to that. He told Benjamin what he had discovered.

"There was no one on the premises. Morris and I searched it roughly. Then we put six men right through it."

"All right," said Benjamin. He thought for a few minutes in

silence. Outside, the factory sirens were calling the early shift to work.

"Pull in the main cordon," he said. "Seal off the Silverstone premises, and get the print and photograph squads right down. Better warn the managing director. But we should have got most of what we want by the time they open up."

He thought about it again. "I want another squad to get round all the places in Gosforth Road which have people living in them. Some of them are offices, but there are shops, too. And people living over the shops."

"In case they saw the getaway?"

"That's right. I'm assuming Bates spotted them climbing out of the grating with the money, or whatever it was they got out of the safe. They couldn't leave a car in Parker's Passage. It's too narrow. On the other hand, they wouldn't want to leave it too far away, either."

Petrella left the experts to work on the Silverstone premises, and himself took charge of the house-to-house search. He was not surprised to find that everyone he questioned knew exactly what had happened. Sharp eyes peering between net curtains had observed and construed the police activity. No one seemed to have slept much.

It was at a tobacconist's shop, a full hundred yards from the alleyway, that he struck the spoor of the animals he was after.

The son of the house said that he had seen a car parked opposite the shop. He had been on his way to the cinema, and had crossed the road to look at it, being interested in cars. It turned out to be a Steyr, an Austrian make, unfamiliar in this country. He was looking at it when three men came up and got in. One of them had told him to "—— off," a piece of blank rudeness not common in his experience. He had noticed that two of the men were carrying heavy briefcases.

"Could you describe them?" asked Petrella.

The boy had only looked at the one who spoke to him. He was biggish and thickset, and had been wearing a raincoat and a hat turned down over his eyes. He had noticed that the man spoke with some difficulty, as though there was something wrong with his jaw or his mouth.

"It's better than nothing, I suppose," said Benjamin. "There aren't a lot of outfits who could pull a smooth job like this. Look at the timing! The office shuts at half past five. They must have given the employees a bit of time to get clear. But they were in, and out, by twenty-five to seven, having cut a hole in that safe into the bargain."

Petrella found a minute, that afternoon, to telephone Miss

Postance. Before he could apologise, she said, " I know all about it. Of course you weren't able to ring me up. I should have thought less of you if you had. I knew Joe Bates. You will catch the men who did it, won't you? "

Petrella said that they would do their best.

" And take care of yourself, too," said Miss Postance.

After he had rung off, Petrella stood for a moment, considering this. Motherly landladies had occasionally put hot waterbottles in his bed and warned him about the dangers of the east wind, but he could not remember that any member of the female sex had ever expressed solicitude for him in quite such a direct and personal way. Oddly enough, he found he rather liked it. He replaced the receiver, and walked back down Gabriel Street to the Station.

It was difficult to say who first mentioned Ronald's name in connection with the shooting.

When any crime takes place, the police turn first to informers. There is no lack of them. The difficulty is not to extract information, but to sift truth from lies, fact from fancy.

For the first few days, the whispers were conflicting. Some were sure the job had been done by one crowd. Some were equally sure that it had been done by another. But by about the third day, a curious consistency was coming into the stories. As the faint, blurred image on the radar screen sharpens to a definite recognisable outline, so there appeared, amidst a haze of rumour and counter-rumour, one hard definitive fact.

Ronald had done the shooting.

As soon as the first hint reached him, Petrella hurried round to see Ronald's mother. Mrs. Hart, a compact, angry, grey-haired woman, told him that she had seen no sign of Ronald since Monday. He was too old, and she was too busy, for her to keep an eye on him all the time. She expected he would turn up sooner or later.

" That's not much to go on," said Benjamin. " He could be off on his own somewhere. All the same, warn the stations in this Division to keep an eye open for him."

That was on Thursday. On Friday morning a lighterman reported that his hawser had fouled an obstruction off the Camperdown Slipway. He thought it was a car. A heavy recovery vehicle went to the spot and pulled out an Austrian Steyr four-door saloon.

The report came in from the police mechanics late that afternoon and Benjamin spread a map on the table. " They say it's been in the water at least three days. The damage to the body-

work suggests that it went in higher up, and has been rolled over by the current or dragged along the bottom."

"Then it went in off Shippam's Wharf or thereabouts," said Petrella. "There's almost a right angle in the river. The scour would run round the longer side of the curve." He demonstrated with his thumbnail.

"There'll be enough light, if we hurry," said Benjamin.

Shippam's Wharf and Shippam's Reach are a relic of an ambitious sand and ballast undertaking which died in the early years of the last war and had never been resurrected: an area of derelict godowns, weed-grown standings, and a length of badly-maintained river bank, the shoring of which was bulging like an old pair of corsets on a remorselessly-spreading woman. Weather and the passage of time had almost wiped the name Shippam from the great wooden gates which barred their progress.

"It doesn't look as if anyone's been through here for a considerable time," said Benjamin.

Petrella, who had jumped out and was examining the gates, came back and spread his hands out. "Oil," he said. "Thick oil. Someone's lifted the left-hand gate off its hinges. I think this is it."

On the wharf they found further evidence in the form of a deep, fresh, scrape. Some heavy body had sliced the rust off one of the bollards.

"Here's where she went over," agreed Benjamin. He squinted downstream in the dusk. "That's the Camperdown on the other side of the bend, isn't it?"

"That's right," said Petrella. "The car would go downstream fast while it still had a bit of buoyancy. Then it'd gradually get silted down."

Benjamin, his hands deep in his raincoat pockets, shivered. The February dusk was bringing up a cold mist with it. Already the lights on the Essex bank were blurring.

"Tomorrow," he said, "I want this place turned inside out."

"What are we looking for?"

"I've no idea," said Benjamin. "But I want it done, all the same."

At eleven o'clock next morning, his hunch was justified. Thrust away into the back of a derelict water-tank they found a gun.

"Take it down to Central as fast as you can drive," said Petrella to Wilmot. "Don't break your neck though. I'd like it to get there safely. They've got the bullet that killed Bates. They'll be able to tell us if this is the gun."

The report was at Gabriel Street by two o'clock. The gun, said the Ballistics Section, was a .38 American Automatic. It

was undoubtedly the gun which had fired test bullet (Z 184) already in their possession. The gun had also, as a matter of routine, been subjected to testing by the fingerprint section who had recovered a set of right-hand prints, three fingers and part of a thumb, from the magazine. These had been identified as the prints of Ronald Hart.

" I never really believed it, somehow," said Petrella to Benjamin. " But there it is in black and white."

" Get out a description on the teletype," said Benjamin. " See if we can find a photograph for circulation. Full-scale search. And have his mother's house watched."

A full-scale search by the Metropolitan Police involves many thousands of men and women, but this was not a case in which any exertion was going to be grudged. From house to house, from street to street, through divisions and districts the hunt ran on. A steady stream of information poured into Gabriel Street, which had become field headquarters for the operation, poured in, was sifted and examined. And, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, proved to be unreliable or irrelevant. For forty-eight hours Benjamin and Petrella slept, taking shifts.

During the late afternoon of the second day, as dusk was falling and Petrella was waiting for his relief, the telephone rang once more . . .

Miss Postance had spent the afternoon in her office, interviewing her probationers. She tried to keep her mind on her exacting job, but more than half her thoughts were elsewhere. She said good-bye to the last of her callers and sat for a few minutes before starting on her endless back-log of reports.

It was at this moment that she heard the window of the next-door room being shut.

She got up slowly and walked across, trying to persuade herself that she had been mistaken. It was not really a room, but a dim annexe to her office where files were stored and tea was made. Its single small window overlooked the passage leading to the back of the building. There came no further sound.

" Imagination," said Miss Postance firmly. She turned the handle and jerked the door open. Standing just inside, an apologetic smile on his face, was the person the whole Metropolitan Police Force was searching for.

" Why, Ronald," she said, " this is a nice surprise. I've been wondering what had happened to you. Why did you come in that way? "

Ronald advanced cautiously into the room. " Do you think we could lock that door? " he said, looking at the door which led into the passage.

"That's all right," said Miss Postance. "No one's going to come in. See—I'll put up the ENGAGED sign."

She walked across, pleased that she was able to do so quite steadily, and opened the door. At the end of the passage, a typewriter clacked from the clerks' room, and she heard the voice of Sergeant Bellew. With a gesture, half angry, half defiant, she reversed the card which said FREE on one side and ENGAGED on the other, and turned back into the room.

"How can I help?" she said.

Ronald was slouching in her visitor's chair, his hands in his pockets, whistling softly between his broken teeth, exactly as she had seen him a dozen times confessing to some minor misdemeanour, asking for tolerance, promising reform.

"You don't think I shot that copper, do you, miss?"

"You ought to know," said Miss Postance. "*Did* you shoot him?"

"That's just it," said Ronald. "That's what I had to come and tell you. I didn't do it. They keep saying I did. They showed me the gun. Made me pick it up. But I never seen it before. Matter of fact—" there was an overtone of almost virginal shame in his voice—"I don't know how to use a gun, really."

Miss Postance said, "Tell me that again, Ronald. About the gun. They made you handle it. Is that right? What did you do, exactly? Can you remember?"

"It was Benny's gun. He showed me how to take the clip out and put it back again. Then they kept saying how I'd shot this copper. And the police were looking for me. But they'd look after me."

"Where was all this, Ronald?"

"Collins Rents. Down by the river."

"And who's this Benny you're talking about?"

"I've been there four, five days now. This afternoon, when Curly was asleep, I got out of the window at the back. I didn't know what to do. I come along to see you."

"You did quite right," said Miss Postance valiantly.

"What do I do now? I don't want to go back. They won't like it, me getting out. Benny said not to show myself."

"Of course you mustn't go back. Benny who?"

"I wouldn't want to go to the police. They'd beat me up, wouldn't they? I wouldn't want that."

"They won't touch you. Not once they've heard your story. Just you sit tight. No one's going to hurt you now."

She pulled the telephone over and asked for Inspector Petrella at Gabriel Street Police Station. When she heard his voice, she

said, with a desperate assumption of calmness, "Could you come to my office, by yourself, as quickly as possible?"

"I can't leave here until Benjamin takes over," said Petrella. "He'll be up inside a quarter of an hour."

"It's very urgent. I've got Ronald here. He tells me some friends of his have been looking after him at a place called Collins Rents down by the river." Out of the corner of her eye she saw Ronald moving. "Please," she added, and put the receiver back with a clatter as he jumped up.

But he wasn't looking at her. His eyes were on the door through which he had come. "Someone getting in, miss," he said. "It's them. They must've seen me getting in."

For a moment Miss Postance stood, undecided. Then she turned and ran for the other door, heard footsteps behind her, fumbled with the handle, and realised that she had left it too late.

At Gabriel Street Petrella sat staring at the receiver in his hands. Then he got stiffly to his feet. He had averaged four hours' sleep for the past five nights, and his mind was working as unwillingly as his body.

He realised afterwards that all he had to do was to ring back the Sergeant in Charge at Kennington and ask him to go in and check up on Miss Postance. This simple solution never occurred to him. His overmastering desire was to get round to Kennington himself.

He ran downstairs, and said to Sergeant Morris in the C.I.D. Room, "Look after things here, will you. I shall be out for half an hour. It's urgent." Then he ran out into the road, leaving Sergeant Morris staring after him.

At the end of the road Petrella found Bernard, dozing in the seat of his taxi. "Kennington," he said. "The Probation Office behind the new Magistrates' Court. See how quick you can get there."

"That quick enough?" asked Bernard, three and a half minutes later. He got no answer. Petrella was already out of the cab and running up the steps.

"Stone a crow!" said Bernard. "He *is* in a hurry."

Sergeant Bellew, in charge of the outer office, was about to pack up for the evening when he heard Petrella arrive. He heard him walk up the passage, pause, and then come back down it fast. By this time he, too, was on his feet.

"What's going on here?" he said. "Sorry, sir. Didn't recognise you. Something wrong?"

"Have you seen Miss Postance?"

"She's in her room."

"Not now," said Petrella.

He led the way back. The room was empty.

"She could've gone out the back way," said Sergeant Bellew, pointing to the door at the end of the passage.

"Where does it lead to?"

"Straight out to the car park. Hullo. What's all that?"

On the floor behind Miss Postance's desk there was a dark patch, still damp.

"More blood here," said the Sergeant. "Been an accident of some sort? I didn't hear anything."

Petrella steadied himself with one hand on the desk, and tried to think. "Do you know a place called Collins Rents?"

"Down by the river?"

"That's right."

"Been condemned. A few people still living there. Go right at the Circus, first left, and keep straight on."

Petrella said, "Ring up Superintendent Benjamin. He'll be in my office at Gabriel Street. Tell him that I think Ronald Hart's somewhere in Collins Rents, and I'm going after him now. Will he bring as many men as he can and come quick. All right?"

Sergeant Bellew had clearly got a number of questions he would have liked to have asked, but Petrella cut him short by turning about and running out of the room. A moment later, the front door slammed.

Superintendent Benjamin had reached Petrella's office a few minutes after Petrella's departure. He, too, was short of sleep, and his temper was not improved by the sight of the empty chair and deserted post.

He rang for Sergeant Morris.

"Went out about five minutes ago," said the Sergeant. "Told me to look after things."

"He'd absolutely no right—" began Benjamin. "All right, Sergeant. Nothing to do with you, of course. I'll see him as soon as he gets back. What's that you've got there?"

"Special Delivery from Central, sir. I was just signing for it when you came in."

The memorandum from the C.R.O. was short and to the point.

"*Benjamin (Benny) Sale, six convictions including larceny from shops and warehouses, breaking and entering, and robbery with violence. Shown by our records to have sustained multiple fractures of the jaw in a fight in Pentonville Prison. Six weeks in prison infirmary prior to release. Could account for difficulty in speaking. Recently known associates, Albert Baker (alias Birket, Benson, Bristow) and Arnold Cutts. All three have carried arms. Present whereabouts unknown.*"

"That's more like it," said Benjamin. As he reached for it, the telephone rang. It was Sergeant Bellew.

He listened in silence as the Sergeant talked, then said, "Anything else?"

"Only one thing, sir. Before I rang you I had a look round. There's a window been forced in the room at the back. And there's blood on the floor of this room."

"Which room?"

"Probation Office. Miss Postance's room."

None of it made a lot of sense, but Benjamin was a man who took first things first.

"Give me that address again," he said. "Collins Rents. North side of Bank Street. Thank you."

He rang off and said to Sergeant Morris, "I'm taking a car myself. Wilmot and Dunster can come with me. I want you to lay on two more full crews. Get them from Southwark and the Elephant. Here's the address they're to come to. Stand by here yourself to relay messages. And then get hold of the Chief Superintendent and tell him what's happening."

"Tell him what's *happening?*" said Sergeant Morris sarcastically. But this was to himself. Superintendent Benjamin was clattering down the stairs.

Collins Rents, or what is left of them since the blitz, lie along the north side of Bank Street; behind them there is a long narrow strip of paved and guttered yard; behind the yard, a line of warehouses; and behind the warehouses, the river.

All this Dunster explained to Benjamin as their car bumped forward into the February dusk. "It used to be one block. The flats were built for the men who worked in the warehouses. That was years ago, of course. They've been condemned dozens of times. But you can't get rid of the people. They just go on living there. Like rats in a stack. You turn right here. The only way to get rid of them's to pull the place down."

Benjamin said, "How many ways in?"

"There's the main front door, with steps up to landings, or I expect you could get into the court at the back."

"Stop here," said Benjamin. "We'll do the last bit on foot." And to the driver, "Stay here, and stop the other cars. Dunster and Wilmot come with me."

Bank Street was empty. A few lights showed behind misty windows from the houses and shops on the south side of the street. The Rents, an ugly black box of brick, was dark and silent.

"Doesn't look as if anyone's at home," growled Benjamin.

"We shouldn't see them," said Dunster. "The windows this side are all boarded up. The rooms people use are at the back. In here."

They turned in through a doorway from which the door had long since vanished, and climbed the worn steps.

"Do people actually live here?" said Benjamin.

"Smells a bit," said Dunster. "But you ought to come here in summer. Better step over that, sir."

They climbed another flight of steps, and found a landing with two doors giving on to it.

"There's a light in here," said Wilmot. He dropped on to one knee and squinted through the letterbox of the left-hand door. Then he tried it gently. "Locked, or bolted."

"We'd better knock them up," said Benjamin. He banged on the door.

"Light's gone out," said Wilmot. And a moment later, "Someone coming."

"Who's that?" said a gruff voice from inside.

"Police. Open up," said Benjamin.

The answer was two shots, fired through the letterbox. The first went through Benjamin's coat. The second hit the wall and ricocheted. Wilmot gave a startled squeal as something red-hot touched his left ear.

The noise, in that confined space, annihilated hearing. But no orders were needed. A few seconds later they were on the lower landing. "They can't rush us here," said Benjamin. "They've got to come down the stairs and, guns or no guns, it's not going to be easy for them to do that. Dunster, get back to the car and bring up the other crews. The first men up are to get round the back and block it."

"Sutthink like, isn't it?" said Wilmot.

He had simple tastes. He liked bright colours, movement, and excitement. "Sidney Street, eh."

"Keep your head down," said Benjamin coldly.

Petrella and Bernard had reached Collins Rents some ten minutes ahead of the official force. They had made no attempt on the front of the building, but gone straight round to the back.

"A car there," said Bernard. "And the radiator's warm. That's the one they came in, all right."

"Can we get in the back way?"

"You might. If you had wings."

Two storeys up, a chink of light was showing.

"Could we get in from the warehouse? There's some sort of archway across. It oughtn't to be too difficult if you could get on top of it."

"Rather you than me," said Bernard.

There was, as Petrella had seen, a tall overhead archway, joining the warehouse and the building at second-storey level.

"Tell you what," said Bernard. "If we can get the brake off this bus—that's all right, they haven't locked it—and push it back a bit—" they suited the action to the words—"then we hop up on top of it, we can reach that window, bust the glass, and get in."

"Brilliant," said Petrella . . .

Three minutes later they were in the warehouse.

A short climb took them up to second-storey level. "All we need now," said Bernard, "is a ruddy great long ladder."

"See if we can get at it from above," said Petrella.

They climbed a further flight of steps.

"Easy," said Bernard. "Out of this window—crawl along that bit of brickwork—reach up—go in the window the other side. You, I mean, not me."

Petrella had one leg over the sill when Bernard stopped him. "You thought what you're going to do when you get inside?"

"I'll worry about that when I get there."

"As I imagined," said Bernard. "No forethought. What you must have on a job like this is bags of forethought. Just wait there. I won't be long."

Two minutes later he was back. Something gleamed in his hand.

"What on earth is it?" said Petrella.

"Fire extinguisher off my bus. Just the thing for close quarters. Put it down the front of your jacket. That's right."

The brick archway, which seemed to have been put in as a strengthening piece between the two buildings, had been slated to keep out the weather. Once he was astride it, Petrella found it quite easy to make his way forward. It was the final step which was going to be tricky.

He had to stand up on the slanting ridgeway, balancing himself with the palms of his hands flat against the brickwork, until he could grasp the windowsill. Then, somehow, he had to open the window.

It was made no easier by the fact that the slates on which he had to stand were loose, and wet with the mist now coming up quite thickly from the river.

He looked over his shoulder, and almost laughed at the comic white blur of Bernard's face.

"Here goes," he said. He stood up.

At this moment the bottom half of the window, which was within a few inches of his nose, started to move.

Bernard croaked a warning. Petrella grabbed the sill, his foot

slipped, the window rose a few inches farther, and a strong white arm came out, and a firm hand grabbed him.

"Who's rescuing who?" demanded Miss Postance.

On the first floor landing of the main staircase, a conference was taking place.

"If you could give the necessary authority," said Inspector Driver, "I could get an issue of small arms up here in less than ten minutes."

"Certainly not," said Benjamin. "Start shooting back, and heaven knows what'll happen." He wandered across and took another look at the crowd, now parked three deep along the opposite pavement as if in preparation for a royal drive-past.

"Besides, I'm not at all sure, yet, that they mean business. We've only had those two shots. That could have been someone holding a gun in his hand which went off by mistake."

"If he was holding a loaded gun, I'd say he meant business anyway," said Driver.

"Well, I'm not going to start any fireworks," said Benjamin. It was all very well for Driver. If a bystander stopped a bullet, Benjamin knew who would be held responsible. "This isn't a job for an Army Corps. You get out, and use your men to keep the crowd back. Wilmot, have you got what I asked for?"

"Two fourteen-pound sledgehammers," said Wilmot. "Found them in the shipyard."

"All right. Take them up to the next landing. You and Dunster can use one each. Stand well clear of the door, on either side, and don't start hitting until we've got the hose coupled up."

"What are you planning to do?" asked Driver.

"When we've got the door down, we'll go straight in on hands and knees, covered by the power-hose. Get a few more of your men into the courtyard at the back, in case they try to break that way. Don't be all night about it."

Sergeant Dunster, his back flat against the passage wall, flexed his muscles and swung the heavy shipwright's beetle once or twice to get the feel of it. He looked at Benjamin, who nodded.

The hammer smacked into the woodwork of the door.

In the succeeding moment of silence a man's voice said, quite close to them, "Lay off that, if you don't want your girl to get hurt."

Benjamin said, "You're bluffing. You haven't got a girl there."

"Want us to twist her arm off and throw it out to you?"

"If you've got a girl there, she'll have to take her chance along with the rest of you. Better pack it up and come out quietly, Benny."

"She's not our girl, she's yours," said Benny Sale. "Like to hear her squeal? Fetch her down, Curly."

"I don't know what he's playing at," whispered Benjamin. "Better hold it until we see who he has got in there."

In fact, the arrival of Curly saved Petrella a lot of trouble. The door of the room had been bolted, top and bottom, on the passage side, and was proving a tough obstacle. Curly was whistling as he came along the passage. It was clear that they were all in for a packet of trouble, but the thought of manhandling a girl was one that appealed to him. He drew the bolts and went in.

Patrella, who was taking no chances, hit him with a brick from the fireplace.

"Is he dead?" said Miss Postance.

"I don't think so," said Petrella. "He's got a very hard head. Tie him up with his braces. Are you in on this, Ronald?"

"Sure, I'll help you, Mr. Petrella," said Ronald. "Give me a gun, and we'll go down and shoot them all up."

"I'm afraid I haven't got a gun. You can have the brick."

"Do be careful," said Miss Postance.

"Don't worry," said Petrella. "Nearly over now. When you've finished that job, *stay here*. And if there's any shooting, lie down."

He got out Bernard's fire extinguisher, an old-fashioned chromium-plated hand model, and started along the passage and down the stairs. There were voices below, but an angle in the passage hid the front door.

Petrella peered round. There were two men. They both held guns in their hands, and both had their backs to him.

A sudden crash shook the building. Benjamin had decided to call off the truce. The door shuddered.

"Where's Curly?" said Benny Sale.

The other man said, "Scarpered, I wouldn't be surprised," turned his head, and saw Petrella.

"I should give it up," said Petrella.

As if his words had been a starter's signal, a number of things then happened in violent and angry succession.

Benny swung round and fired blindly up the passage. Petrella drove down the handle of the fire extinguisher, and a stream of white foam shot out and enveloped Benny. Ronald threw his brick, which hit no one. The door collapsed inwards, and through it, as though it had been waiting outside for entry, came a solid, hissing, steel pillar of water.

It was, perhaps, unfortunate that Miss Postance, contrary to orders, should have come downstairs and chosen this moment to round the corner.

When Petrella reached her and scooped her up, she was not only soaked; she was, for the moment, speechless.

"It's all right," she said at last. "I can manage by myself now."

Petrella observed, with only half his attention, the rapid conclusion of the fight in the front hall. Ronald was sitting on the second man, hammering his head on the floor. Benny seemed chiefly concerned with wiping the foam out of his eyes.

Petrella looked down at the dripping, half-undressed girl in his arms, and realised, for the first time, that he didn't even know her christian name.

© Michael Gilbert 1960

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HALF A CUCKOO PINT, PLEASE

In July away I fly—and not before it was time, say some ungrateful country-dwellers who claim the double cucks give them hiccups. The cuckoo is a witty bird, according to the song, however, and no doubt he could answer our questions. How are your wits? If only so-so, solutions on page 143.

1. *The Cuckoo sings from St. Tiburtius' Day to St. John's Day. When are these days?*
2. *How's your gastronomy? Can you name the chief ingredients of a. Zabaglione; b. Bortsch; c. Crêpes Suzette?*
3. *What are a. The Roaring Forties; b. The Chiltern Hundreds?*
4. *Where are a. The Pantiles; b. The Backs; c. Arthur's Seat; d. St. Michael's Mount?*
5. *Can you identify these famous opening lines:*
   a. "I was sick—sick unto death of that long agony."
   b. "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life . . . these pages must show."
   c. "My Father had a small Estate in Nottinghamshire; I was the Third of five Sons."
6. *Flower or vegetable—what have these three in common: Nigella, Amaranthus Caudatus, Viola tricolor?*
7. *Who wrote: a. Beltane the Smith;*
   b. Robinson Crusoe;
   c. Brown on Resolution;
   d. Zuleika Dobson?
8. *Who a. was the Great Long Red-legged Scissor Man;*
   b. fought a duel with a divided pair of scissors;
   c. was given a small pair of gold scissors to crack nuts?

FURRY DANCE

She was on the lawn at dusk—
on a garden-scented June evening

BY GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

ALL THIS getting together of priests and doctors, all these subtleties—well, they aren't really supposed to interest a vet. Our patients do not talk, so it is assumed that the interactions of mind and body pass us by. Yet language—the language of words, that is—lays a completely false trail as often as not.

My only experience of a miracle had nothing to do with healing and still less with faith. It's a trivial instance, but all the more significant because the physical result of the mental magic was not intended.

Varvara Noyevna was a woman of forty, taking a fair average. She looked thirty, I mean, but unless she had danced Odile at Covent Garden when she was sixteen she must have been nearer fifty. She had brilliant forget-me-not blue eyes and the trim, stocky build which is common to most first-class ballerinas. Indispensable, I suppose. Without it they could never have the physical endurance. And since they can elongate themselves like cats, their compactness is only noticeable in private.

I would not say she was a beautiful woman, though it was impossible not to be moved and enchanted by the play of her face when she was talking.

On the stage, of course, she must have been adorable. They still talk of her Firebird, and how the audience sobbed for the sheer unattainable loveliness of her. But I never saw Varvara dance in public.

She had retired on her winnings and bought a little estate. She decorated her life with it rather than farmed it, but made the place pay for itself all the same. Varvara was inflexibly efficient. She cut straight through to the heart of any financial or artistic problem, arranged it and dismissed it. Thereafter she was delightfully free to bring her will to bear on any other unsuspected, unsuspecting object.

That spring she was directing a new ballet. The gossip columns said that she thought nothing of keeping colleagues in conference for a solid ten hours and that two of her backers had

emerged from the room in such a state of tearful hysteria that their cigars wouldn't light.

At weekends she would come home to rest, dining alone and seeing no one until Saturday when her batteries were recharged. But one Friday night she had to send for me. Would I come round at once and attend to her prize Southdown ram?

When I had put a couple of stitches in the patient, I had a leisurely drink with her. She was unlike her usual self, nervous and disinclined to sit still. Suddenly she burst out, "Robin, I am *not* hard! Am I? Am I?"

The ram didn't think so, anyway. He had very painfully jumped a barbed wire fence just for the pleasure of being scolded in Russian and fed with whatever fruit she had on her plate. She had brought him up on the bottle herself, and he liked to join her at dinner.

"Not a bit hard," I assured her.

"He said my eyes were hard. They always told me my eyes were hard. Always. All my life."

I could see what he had meant—her backer or manager or whatever he was. Those luminous, entrancing eyes were in a way hard. Could they be anything else? Remember the dedication, the daily hours of practice from the age of seven on! Think of the perfecting of genius, the ruthless precision of the artist who is determined that her work shall be a standard of comparison fifty years after her death!

"I want," she sobbed, "I want to lie on a furry rug, a white rug, and be made a pet of. I am . . .." she searched for the right word and, as so often happens in moments of real emotion, produced one which was nearly comic. "I am fluffy, Robin. In my soul I am fluffy."

It was hard to believe that she, the idol of the intelligent world, had not been petted to a point of boredom, on furry rug or not. But probably she had never found enough time for it. I don't know much about her personal life. There was a short, smashed marriage somewhere. Her past seemed irrelevant when she lived so intensely in the present. We were always enjoying something here and now. It might be a fine beast or a field of buttercups or simply a ripple of conversation which illuminated every little subject it touched.

Robeen she called me—her pronunciation promoting me into a sort of honorary Russian who could float happily on the incomprehensible. She once picked up a syringe and danced my bedside manner. I could recognise myself, damn it, but an ideal self! She transmuted the normal confidence of any vet into a godlike simplicity of approach to all living things.

She had the same influence over her two cats, Suleiman Shah and Nur-ed-Din. Some such names as Bob and Jerry would have suited them better. But they had to live up to what she thought of them, and they enjoyed it.

They were a fine pair of young tabby toms, short-haired and completely undistinguished. She had picked them up as kittens, staggering along a London gutter, and they were now about eight months old—nearly full-grown but not yet of the age to be overwhelmed by their male responsibilities. They had the wonderful gaiety and intelligence which you sometimes find in a boy of thirteen.

Ever since they were old enough to kill, Suleiman Shah and Nur-ed-Din had also been addicted to the dance. Most cats are quite content with crouchings and pouncings, but some will prance on their hind legs and toss their prey high in the air, pirouette and twist and catch it again and throw it again in an ecstasy of triumph which has no relation at all to any of the movements used in hunting. So you cannot account for it by calling it practice. It is not even a repetition of the stalk and the strike. It's a dance. I myself could never watch them without interference. The dance becomes unbearable if the mouse or baby rabbit is very much alive.

"No, Robeen, wait!" Varvara cried, putting a hand on my arm. "It is the tail, you see, which one cannot imitate. But now they only use tail for balance. It is like a furry skirt. This I can do!"

She was utterly incapable of causing pain to any animal herself. But to the artist nothing mattered except the natural technique with which the little feet expressed emotion. That was the contradiction in her. If you want to reproduce the quintessence of joy and agony so exquisitely that you can take away for ever our fear of either, you must coldly and brutally study the real thing.

It was after some producer with a secretary and an expensive car had come down for the day and gone away fuming—to the amusement of the whole village, for we all knew what she was like when it came to buying a cow or selling a used tractor—that I first saw her dancing with the cats.

It was dusk of a garden-scented June evening. I came round the corner of the house, and there she was on the lawn with her lovely white arms tossing an imagined object in the air as intangibly as the spray of water in a shooting gallery, and there were the cats on their hind legs and she weaving in and out of them with steps as fast and soft as their own.

I could hear the strings of the orchestra. Well, not to exaggerate at all, I could follow the time.

And I knew what she was expressing. It didn't take a knowledge of ballet conventions to do that. The language of so great an artist is clear. She had entered the world forbidden to the real Varvara—the abandoned self-indulgence of the fluffy and the frivolous. It must have been going on night after night, for her two partners were perfect at the game.

Game—that is what it was to them. No witchcraft. No romantic nonsense. A down-to-earth, highly enjoyable game with a beloved mistress who could imitate their own form of fun vividly enough for them to realise exactly what she was doing.

Varvara did not stop when she saw me. I was an audience. She began instantly to be too perfect a cat for Suleiman Shah and Nur-ed-Din. They strolled off, washed themselves shortly, and greeted me with their usual warm politeness.

She joined us, radiant and immensely pleased with herself.

"How on earth do you make them do it?" I asked.

She replied with mock indignation that she didn't make them do it at all. They asked for it. A bunch of feathers or a hare's foot was enough to start them off, and they were prepared to go on as long as she liked.

It was true—though once the game had started, her pattern and her will were of course dominant. The charge of sympathy between her and her partners was terrific. Each became what the other wanted. That is very important. Each became what the other wanted.

There is no mystery in it. Watch a shepherd and his dog, or a show-jumper and his horse! They become nearly one individual, not two. The human being has only to demand from the animal a heightening, an amplification of an instinct which is already there . . .

She went up to London for the first two weeks of her new ballet, taking the cats with her as she always did. She returned triumphant. The critics were busy pretending that they knew all along she had been right. It was very satisfactory, but to be adulated was not to be petted.

Back in the village she called me in to prescribe for Suleiman Shah and Nur-ed-Din. She was not a woman to fuss her cats with vets. But they had spoilt their appetites by joyous thieving of cocktail canapés, and I guessed they were short of the calcium which a healthily murderous cat gets from crunching tiny bones.

I discovered imperceptibly that she expected me to be her doctor, too. Most unprofessional. Fortunately she had nothing wrong with her—she was too enchanted by all her activities for

it to occur to her that falling ill was the best possible way to be petted—so I played the game she wanted by attending unnecessarily to trivial splinters, cuts, and mosquito bites. She was identifying herself with Suleiman Shah and Nur-ed-Din, and she knew it. She purred all over with laughter when I prescribed for her two saucers of milk to be taken at bedtime.

Meanwhile she expressed herself by interior decoration. She produced an unhygienic drawing-room full of soft velvets and oriental cushions, with the white furry rug to lie on which I had thought a mere figure of speech—four polar bear skins with the compliments of the Canadian Government.

Then suddenly she threw herself at the evening ballet classes again with an eager softness which was more than ever compelling.

"You are tiring the cats, Varvara," I told her.

They were definitely out of breath.. But the mutual fascination was such that they couldn't lie down and ignore her.

"They must be patient while I learn," she answered. "To mime a cat—any cabaret artiste can do it! But to *be* a cat . . . Oh, if only I had long fur, Robeen!"

I was already wondering what new row had driven her to emphasise her longing for fluffiness when the publicity broke.

She had challenged the whole of her own world by persuading the most promising young dancer of the National Ballet to leave the company for a year or two and gain experience. It was such obviously improvident advice that nobody bothered to oppose it till too late. Varvara had secretly arranged the girl's contracts and financed her.

As the storm of abuse descended on their mistress, Suleiman Shah and Nur-ed-Din changed character. No more Bob and Jerry about them. They spent their days curling up luxuriously upon whatever softness was unpacked from the steady stream of parcels, and there was something odd about their fur. It was not exactly the staring fur of a sick cat, but it was untidy like a man's hair which has not grown long enough to lie down.

When I came back from my annual holiday in September, I had not seen Varvara for over a month. Then, after another week while I was reducing my practice to normal, there was a great yellow harvest moon, not so glaring as summer silver but more inescapable. It reminded me of Varvara, and was itself an invitation to look in on the private stage which her personality created.

The three had, I think, been dancing; but when I arrived Varvara and the cats were on the white rug in a corner of the garden, and it was hard to say who was stroking whom. For a moment I was horrified. Surely, surely one could never change two such friends? Then I realised that these lovely young

Persian toms, with their heavy growth of long fluffy hair, were indeed Suleiman Shah and Nur-ed-Din at last fully justifying their exotic names.

Their winter coat? A tendency to lengthen hair in autumn—though it was months too early—may have helped the miracle; so may the little extra calcium I had given them. But short-haired cats grow at most an extra inch. They do not become long-haired cats.

" But how has it and how . . . ? " I began incoherently.

" I know," she said. " Isn't it delicious? Every day they have been changing into what I always wanted to be."

It seemed to her perfectly natural. She didn't question it, didn't see that it was impossible. And if I had lectured her on the peculiar physical effects of rhythm and suggested that it was the witch-doctor's dance which operated his magic, she would merely have answered that of course it was. © Geoffrey Household 1960

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NOT GOOD FORM

A liner had been delayed leaving Naples and their reserved bedrooms had not yet been vacated. The valet of a Mr. Van Allen, a distinguished American diplomat, who had been friendly with the Glyns on board, succeeded in finding a bedroom with only two single brass beds in it and it was proposed that all five should share this for the night. Elinor and her maid Williams were to have one bed, Mr. Van Allen the other, Clayton was to be on the sofa and Mr. Van Allen's valet on a chair.

Williams was appalled at the presumption of sharing a bed with her mistress and slept on the very edge. Clayton and Mr. Van Allen undressed with difficulty behind a small screen; the valet did not even unfasten his collar.

It was a disturbed night.

The valet sat bolt upright on a small gilt chair, his mouth wide open, snoring hard, while his master occasionally shouted at him. At intervals Williams fell out of bed. The lamplight poured into the room through the Venetian blinds and when Elinor sat up in bed to get a breath of air, she noticed Mr. Van Allen propped on one elbow, staring at her, murmuring, " God! What a form! "

Whenever she woke up during the night, he was still sitting gazing at her, muttering passionately to himself.

" Old fool! " said Clayton the next day, who was not amused at the breakdown in his travelling arrangements, " bothering about women when we were all so tired."

ANTHONY GLYN, *Elinor Glyn*

SUCCESS STORY

BY MARY TURNER

EXTRACT FROM THE CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF LOVESOME PLOT ... And whatever your garden brain-teaser, our experts have the answer for you.

A successful New Gardening Year to all our readers!
Garden your troubles away with LOVESOME PLOT...

" Weefour "
Gasworks Rd.
Gaytown

To The Editor, Lovesome Plot — January 1st

Dear Sir,

I wonder if you could help me. Its my hubby really. Sometimes hes quite unpleasant like last Thursday he said he was going to leave me. Well I know the kiddies are highspirited you cant check little kiddies can you but its no good trying to explain to him. So I thought if I could get them interested in gardening and that it would keep them out of the house because my hubby hardly ever goes in the garden hes got a weak chest.

Yours truly,
Cherryleen Waterhouses (Mrs.)

From the Editor, Lovesome Plot — January 7th

Dear Mrs. Waterhouses,

A little garden of their own will keep the chicks as busy as the day is long!

Dig two spits deep as soon as old Jack Frost will let you get on to the ground. Rake to a fine tilth to prepare the seed-bed in early March. Take your kiddies to any reliable seed-merchant and help them to choose wisely from the great range of good-tempered beauties now available!

Your Pal, *The Editor*

P.T.O

"Weefour"
Gasworks Rd.
Gaytown
January 18th

To The Editor, Lovesome Plot

Dear Sir,

I said to my hubby when he was going on so Well you cant expect kiddies to be patient can you and I'm sure I haven't had time all the week with all the work I have to do and all that way to the Launderette. Well I cant take it back because they dont remember where the shop is, theyre only little tots, but I do think its a shame to sell kiddies a packet with only one seed in dont you even if it is a big one. They opened the packet to see so I cant read what the label says what should I do now?

Yours truly,
Cherryleen Waterhouses (Mrs.)

From the Editor, Lovesome Plot January 25th

Dear Mrs. Waterhouses,

One must never discourage independence in kiddies. They will come to no harm.

Sow in March in seed-boxes. Cover with brown paper till germination takes place. Transplant into rich nursery beds when first pair of true leaves has appeared. Remove to permanent quarters at beginning of May.

Good luck, junior gardeners!

Your Pal, *The Editor*

"Weefour"
Gasworks Rd.
Gaytown
April 15th

To The Editor, Lovesome Plot

Dear Sir,

Well its come up and it looks all right to me but you know what kiddies are nothings quick enough for them and my hubby makes it worse telling them you cant grow anything on this soil but stones he got Rita quite hysterical mind you shes ten and I always say girls get difficult when theyre that age dont they and my kiddies are high strung.

Yours truly,
Cherryleen Waterhouses (Mrs.)

From the Editor, Lovesome Plot April 20th

Dear Mrs. Waterhouses,

Explain to your girlies that plants need feeding just like people, so that they can grow and be strong. They will love to learn about this.

Applications of weak liquid fertiliser weekly will keep their garden gay and flourishing.

Your Pal, *The Editor*

"Weefour"
Gasworks Rd.
Gaytown
June 18th

The Ed, Lovesome Plot

Dear Sir,

Well I coûldnt believe my eyes the way it grew after they gave it a bottle of that stuff you said. Bigger than Rita it is now mind you I dont remember how much is right but I don't think they ought to have put the whole bottle at once. And then there was a nice row I must say when my hubby found out though its not as if he ever goes without anything he wants I always say. Do you realise I said to him its me that pays out of what you give me for the housekeeping if you can call it that and Im still wearing the coat I had when we were married and that was the worst days work I ever did.

Well he put his foot down and said he wasnt going to have any more money wasted on that disgusting stuff unhealthy he said and I thought the kiddies would carry on but its funny they never. Little June shes ever such a brainy kid though shes only seven she said to me I wonder what it would like for its dinner now Mum ever so solemn and she looked at me with her big blue eyes shes a lovely kiddy really and now theyre both as busy as anything making a bed for Pussy underneath it because they say its nice and shady for her sweet isnt it so its all gone off all right alls well that ends well I always say.

Yours truly,
Cherryleen Waterhouses (Mrs.)

From the Editor, Lovesome Plot July 1st

Dear Mrs. Waterhouses,

So glad to hear that little Rita and little June are getting on well with their own little "Lovesome Plot" garden. You do not tell me the name of their favourite plant?

Keep the hoe going to prevent weeds!

Your Pal, *The Editor*

"Weefour"
Gasworks Rd.
Gaytown
July 3rd

To The Editor, Lovesome Plot

Dear Sir,

I should have thought youd have remembered taking such an interest like that the kiddies lost the packet so I dont know what its called. You must excuse short letter as Im a bit upset Pussy has disappeared mind you Id expected real trouble when I told the kiddies theyve seemed so fond of her lately but they took it ever so quietly do you think they would like rabbits.

Yours truly,
Cherryleen Waterhouses (Mrs.)

EXTRACT FROM LETTER TO EDITOR, LOVESOME PLOT

. . . The rabbits keep disappearing do you think it could be this mixammatosis. . . I enclose photo of plant more a creeper isnt it its ever so large now. . .

EXTRACT FROM LETTER FROM EDITOR, LOVESOME PLOT

. . . Surely if it were some disease the little furry bodies would still be in the cage! Perhaps you should watch for two-legged thieves! ! ! . . . Your photograph is most interesting, we should much like it if you would allow our Roving Reporter to call. . .

"Weefour"
Gasworks Rd.
Gaytown

The Editor, Lovesome Plot

Dear Sir,

Well of course Im sure I dont mind your young gentleman calling if he doesnt mind its a bit awkward not knowing where my hubby has gone I expect he will turn up I always say hes too big to vanish just like that though I must say it makes it easier at home though the neighbours talk but at least it hasnt upset the kiddies theyre all wrapped up in their garden but then you dont know what goes on in their little minds do you. It has got some lovely flowers so should show up well in a photo Im sure. I have time to sit out in the garden now I dont have to get supper for my hubby its a real pleasure.

Yours truly,
Cherryleen Waterhouses (Mrs.)

"Weefour"
Gasworks Rd.
Gaytown
August 1st

To The Editor, Lovesome Plot
Dear Sir,

Well really how can I tell you whats happened to your reporter its none of my business not that he wasnt a very pleasant young gentleman but Ive got enough on my hands being left like this and I never set eyes on him after the kiddies took him in the garden to see the plant I was scrubbing through and hadnt time to go. I enclose his camera which I found like thrown down on the grass and should be glad of postage.

Yours truly,
Cherryleen Waterhouses (Mrs.)

EXTRACTS FROM GAYTOWN CHRONICLE :

August 12th

Police are investigating the disappearance of Mrs. Cherryleen Waterhouses, (31) pretty blonde mother of two. Distressed, her two little girls, Rita (10) and June (7) clung to Policewoman Mary Biggs and pleaded, "What will happen to our garden now Mummy has gone?" The little girls are keen amateur gardeners. They are staying with a kindly neighbour, but go in every day after school to their deserted home to tend their plants.

August 26th

Police are investigating the disappearance of Policewoman Mary Biggs, (25) pretty blonde women's weight-putting champion, who was investigating the disappearance of Mrs. Cherryleen Waterhouses, (31) pretty blonde mother of two. . .

GAYTOWN CHRONICLE — September 1st

SUCCESS STORY

Orphan Kiddies win Local Flower Show Award

TWO brave little golden-haired girls carried all before them at the Gaytown Flower Show last Saturday. Experts were baffled to identify their exhibit . . .

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© Mary Turner 1960

Patter of Tiny Feet

Where is the poet fired to sing
The snail's discreet degrees?

E. V. LUCAS, *The Snail*

The gaping goldfish in his bowl
I'm sure is happy on the whole:
He has that silly vacant look
Because he's never read a book.

A. G. PRYS-JONES

Friendly Toads

Sir,—My family had a pet toad in the garden of our Ladywood (Birmingham) house. "Tim," as we called him, doted on lump sugar and displayed astonishing intelligence.

Grandmother couldn't abide Tim and used to shoo him out of the house when he had hopped in to warm himself at the kitchen fire. He would sit staring into the blaze, panting very much as a bulldog does—but on hearing his enemy's step descending the stairs, he would turn away and lope to the door.

REX B. COLEY, *Letter in The Observer*

Sir,—Our toad lives in the area. On wet days he climbs up the window and waves to us.

JONATHAN WARD (Age 7), *Letter in The Observer*

Staff Slug

Sir,— . . . I had for years a staff slug in my washhouse. My slug was a handsome yellow fellow, 4 in. long, and came in every night to clear up the splashes round the cat's saucer.

He was perfectly tame, though if disturbed while drinking he was obviously affronted—and once he reared up and swung his frills in a threatening manner. He was most punctual, and after doing his job always went straight home under the door to the soft-water butt.

DOROTHY HARTLEY, *Letter in The Observer*

Soliloquy of a Tortoise
on Revisiting
the Lettuce Beds
after an Interval of One Hour
while Supposed
to be
Sleeping
in a Clump
of Blue Hollyhocks

One cannot have enough
Of this delicious stuff!

E. V. RIEU

Wandervogel?

Dear Lady, Although I am only a little German sparrow, still I can read, and I see in the papers that many kind friends are taking an interest in us . . . In Germany, everywhere where we have friends, they place, either on the roof of the house or somewhere where we can get at it easily, a little bundle of hay or straw and pieces of cotton-wool. During a severe frost food is of no use to us unless we can protect ourselves against the cold, and you can have no idea, unless you are a sparrow (which I suppose you are not,) what we can do with even a few little pieces of rubbish. Of course I know that we can get what we want in the stable yards; but personally, I dare not go near them, as the cats in London seem so wild and hungry . . . Will you put this in your paper and oblige,

A FOREIGN SPARROW, *The Lady, February* 1885

Catechism

Is this small ball of fur a noedipus,
Or just a budding feline Oedipus?
Will he, with lavish milk by me supplied,
Quickly forget his new-left mother's side?
Or, complex-fixed, become a groedipus?

PENDENNIS CASTLE,
Anxious Lines on a New Kitten

Dogmatic

There are two things which are necessary for a dog that lives indoors, most especially in London—vegetarianism and a regular bath . . . Milk pudding, porridge, potatoes, and green vegetables cut up very small—all these are good for him, but meat is not. Better for him that he should not be a teetotaller than not a vegetarian. A glass of sherry will do him no harm, but a plate of meat will. Your own dog should sleep in your bedroom.

Sir John Lubbock has taught his dog to read; but this must have involved an amount of patience and knowledge of how to instruct that few of us possess. Only a dog of the lowest intelligence cares to go for a walk by itself; the charm of a walk is that it shall be taken in the company of its master.

The Lady, March 1885

Mice-anthropy

I hear a mouse
Bitterly complaining
In a crack of moonlight
Aslant on the floor—

" Little I ask
And that little is not granted.
There are few crumbs
In this world any more . . .

Moonlight is there
And a bare place for dancing,
But no little feast
Is spread any more."

ELIZABETH COATSWORTH, *The Mouse*

ROCKET TEST

He shot the moon a calculating glance,
all fear behind him

BY J. E. BAKER

HE was losing her and he knew it. He had always expected it to happen. From the unbelievable moment when Nina had said she would marry him, he had waited for this.

If it had been Hefflin, Taggart, Sorrensen, or even McQuade he could have let her go. He had rehearsed the scene many times. The renunciation. He behaved with dignity, detached from their messy emotions.

That's the way Clayton could have played it with anyone else. But it was Johnny Brand, a jumped-up air-circus hick.

They came into the room together.

" Sorry to disturb you, Clay," she said. " I met Mr. Brand in the hall. He says he must see you."

Nina was so lovely in a plain silk suit the colour of champagne that he had no eyes for Brand. He knew how Brand looked only too well: big and tough, damn near coarse with his weathered tan and sandy hair shaved almost to his skull.

He was never sure of Nina. Women had tricks with their hair, make-up, clothes, jewels, perfumes. Nina, he supposed, knew them all, but she used them with a fashion model's expertise, achieving breathtaking effects, endless variations which brought about subtle changes in her personality.

She mystified him, enthralled him—obsessed him.

" Sorry, Mr. Clayton," Brand said, " but this is urgent."

Brand always called him Mr. Clayton, occasionally, sir. The way he said it made it sound like a sneer. Brand stripped him of dignity and detachment.

" There's trouble in number one, sir," Brand crackled. " Hefflin's been trying to get you. Must be a fault in the line. He's worked out a modification to the ancillary feed. Needs your O.K. He's got a team lined up to work all night."

" You're not on errand boy's pay, Brand."

Brand shrugged. " I'm expendable—temporarily."

Tempor-airily! Brand was expendable.

"You've delivered your message. You'll excuse me, I'm sure," Clayton said. "Make yourself at home—or perhaps you already have."

Brand's quizzical regard incensed him. Might as well try to insult a warthog.

"I'm going back to the field to turn in," Brand said. "I can give you a lift. Hefflin would bring you back."

The telephone line wasn't faulty. They didn't think he knew the doctor had advised them not to let him drive since he had that giddy spell. They thought he believed it just happened that there was always transport on the spot when he needed it. Nina wanted him to get his own driver but he liked to have her take him about, though there were often these all-night sessions when he couldn't ask her to turn out.

"Thank you," Clayton said acidly, "if it's not too much trouble. It won't take you long to get back to my wife."

Nina had the grace to act wide-eyed. She broke the silence with a breathless, "Clay!"

Brand's cleft chin went up. "Are you ready, sir?"

Nina was wearing her pale gold hair in two crossed swathes shaped to her head, her poise regal. He liked it best breaking in a creamy froth on her shoulders, and the spirited gaiety that went with the style. She hardly ever wore it that way any more. The pear-drop pearl earrings he had given her last month for their first wedding anniversary gleamed against the sheen of her skin.

He saw them exchange a glance. It was secret. They were communicating the way lovers do, scheming, desiring. He had never reached Nina with a glance. Whenever their eyes met, his slid away to hide the awful power she had over him. If he allowed her to see his total subjugation she would take him away from his work entirely. He wouldn't be able to resist her. He would follow her like a besotted youth.

He dared not touch her. He left her without a word.

Brand drove with the insolent assurance of a man who knows he is in control, the way he did everything—the way he would make love to a woman.

What right had Brand, a moronic rocket pilot, to assume the arrogance of a master?

He was the master, the brain. Without him there would be no Project. This vast desert region would still belong to the lizards and prickly pear. *He*, Clayton, had called this town into being. As far as the eye could see there were avenues of prefabs: dwellings, workshops, laboratories, offices, stores, a hospital, shops, clubs, and deep underground the reason for it all.

The subterranean cavern cradled his ship. *His* heart and reason for living—or so it had been until he met and married Nina during a brief trip to push up the government appropriation. The politicians and service chiefs talked figures at him, hundreds of millions. To humour them he submitted to their social entertainments, vaguely aware that he was being given the full VIP treatment.

It was at one of their dreary cocktail parties that he had entered Nina's orbit and found himself incapable of thrusting free...

As the car approached he could see the launching ramp pointing its challenge against the sky.

The town was called Conyers because this stretch had been known as Conyers Reach. One day it would be changed to Claytonstown, or simply Clayton.

Brand was putting him in the picture, his speech concise, peremptory, damn him. " If the exact location of the overheating can be determined tonight there's still a chance. If not the trials must be delayed."

Must!

" Who said they must be delayed? "

Brand seemed to be choosing his words as if to avoid offending a child. " You yourself laid down the safety limits, Mr. Clayton. The rest of us work to them."

" Safety limits! Margin of safety! That's all I hear. Certainly I fixed the limits but they're too stringent. I'm running out of time. I can't wait until I can issue a guaranteed return ticket. I can't be sure I can bring a man back without damaging his health, upsetting his mind, or wrecking his love life. Nothing's *sure*. Do you think I don't want to get the ship back? "

" I'm ready any time you say."

He ignored Brand. " Fifteen years of testing metals, devising fuels. Testing machines and now testing men." The words came out thin and stretched like threads of gum. " Before that a lifetime of research and planning for a dream. You don't know what it is to use your brain until it bleeds, to throw over every normal human happiness for an ideal."

" You're not alone."

Brand's assumption of fellowship caught him by the throat. To Brand, Hefflin, and the others it was a job of work. They were keen but they still kept their outside interests. They talked sport and politics, sex and weather reports. Clayton was adrift, apart.

" What do you know about being alone? " he scoffed. " You're young."

Was that why he hated Brand? He wasn't old but he was

getting older. Every failure took a little more out of him. Each time he had to grovel before fools he felt lessened. Soon he would be drained and somebody like this slaphappy boy would snatch his triumph.

And his wife.

Nina, too, was his triumph. The thought smote him as blasphemy. His ship came first. Nina had divided him. The notion that he had sacrificed one to another and would end up with neither tormented him. He had no more conquered his wife than he had conquered space.

Brand coveted both. He would not allow it. Brand could easily get himself killed. In a place like this there were a number of strange ways a man might die. He didn't need Brand. He had set his hopes on McQuade.

"Who's in the Haybox?" he barked.

"McQuade baled out at eighteen hundred hours," Brand told him. "After thirty-two hours nineteen minutes. Best yet."

But Clayton swore.

That his ship depended upon the endurance of men was bitter to him. While he perfected a machine, Whelan sought the formula of mental qualities required of its crew. Whelan believed that a man who could take the Haybox for thirty-six hours was a likely candidate, but the figure was arbitrary.

The Haybox resembled a giant vacuum flask. Sealed up in it, the subject's tolerance of absolute isolation, dehumanisation, could be gauged, the findings compared, categories established.

Suspended in an outer casing the container was soundproof, odours neutralised. The volunteer could move within its limits, wearing an insulated suit, masked by a visor he could not operate, his hands enclosed in thickly-padded mittens denying him the sense of touch.

A number of tilting scoops provided flavourless concentrates. Tasteless fluids were drawn through a metal tube. Blind, without hearing, touch, taste, or smell he was under constant observation through an inner and outer panel, every physical and mental reaction which science was capable of evaluating electronically recorded.

All very ingenious, but as far as Clayton could judge it proved no more than the degree of latent claustrophobia present in all men. Man was the unknown quantity in his calculations. Could a graph accurately describe the workings of a man's mind?

Brand stopped the car at the launching ramp, remaining behind the wheel.

"Why don't you come on down and solve my trifling problems?" Clayton jibed.

" I've been ordered to turn in early," Brand said. He smiled faintly. " I'm scheduled for a spell in the Haybox in the morning."

It took three assistants half an hour to prepare Johnny Brand for the Haybox. Professor Whelan, the controller, fussed over his latest guinea-pig.

Johnny knew that, in theory, there was no reason why he should not remain in there for weeks; no pain, no more discomfort than that felt by any man in solitary confinement.

McQuade hadn't been able to explain why he had lasted so short a time. According to Whelan no one had ever been able to explain. The best flyers have always been men who could live with themselves, Whelan had said.

Johnny was sprouting wires which ran into a single cover on his helmet. This lead, expanding like a telephone cord, carried through a hatch at the top of the cylinder. Johnny orientated himself: the food bar, the cunningly contrived sanitary arrangements, the dentist's chair to which he must always return.

They were ready. Whelan secured the visor. It had begun.

The last thing Johnny saw was Clayton, sitting at the observation panel . . .

At first Johnny thought of only one thing: beating McQuade. This filled him with joyous determination backed by a splendid confidence in his own powers.

He hummed the Entry of the Gladiators. The vibrations in his head had a seashell remoteness.

Control of the mind, that was the thing. He concentrated, directing his forces towards the ship. Noting each component, he stripped and reassembled piece by piece, again and again. He followed each control from panel to point of function until he could wait for the take-off no longer.

At the first launching he was bunched with nerves. As the ship left the launching pad he felt the flesh pouring off his bones. Escape velocity! He recovered, checked gauges, and when the motors cut finally, drifted into Nothing. No speed, no time. Nothing. A hundred times he launched the ship and made landfall, looking up at the strange disc, now his moon.

On the earth Clayton was spinning—and Clayton's wife.

The trick was to keep his thoughts where he wanted them. The launching began to bore him. He saw himself in a check cap, spotted silk scarf, smoking a pipe, nonchalantly flipping switches, drawling to base that the milk run was getting to be tedious.

It was an effort to know whether he was sleeping or waking, sitting or standing. Only by letting himself fall could he be absolutely certain.

Then there was no certainty. Having fallen, he thought perhaps he had dreamt he had fallen and tried again.

He must have been in the Haybox a month. All he had to do was to press the button on his suit belt and he could have a smoke and a beer.

That wasn't very bright. He hadn't had a cigarette or a drink for more than a year—or a woman.

It had been a mistake not to kiss Nina when he'd had the chance. If he had he wouldn't keep thinking about it. Nuts, he wasn't thinking about her! But he was.

He was remembering last night—hell, not last night, there was no night or day any more—the night he had dropped Clayton off at the launching-ramp.

"Why don't you come on down and solve my trifling problems?" Clayton had jibed . . .

As Clayton disappeared under the ramp that night Johnny's smile had broadened. Clayton knew darn well that McQuade had been in the Haybox. He resented all pilots with an intensity bordering on mania, but if he had to hand his ship over to anyone he wanted McQuade, who was quiet, steady, and pushing the age limit.

Johnny slammed his car into gear and swung about. As he moved across to take the fork leading to his sleeping-quarters the lights of an approaching vehicle dipped on and off. A white convertible rocked to a standstill in his path.

He saw a lithe figure coming for him and slumped in his seat with a groan. Until Clayton started making cracks Clayton's wife had been just another woman to Johnny. She had a bit more of everything than all the rest, but he didn't lose any sleep over it.

Johnny Brand was going places—the moon, no less—before he got slowed up by a woman. The girl he had wanted hadn't wanted him enough to come here, and now he regarded it as a lucky escape. He'd slung that torch and he wasn't going to carry another yet awhile, least of all for Clayton's wife.

"Mr. Brand. Oh, Johnny."

She had dropped in through his window, singing his name. He noticed she was wearing her hair down on her shoulders.

"You want to get us both shot?" he whistled through his teeth.

"Please, oh please. I must talk to someone."

"Anybody but me, lady."

"Who then?" she demanded, her fair hair sweeping his shoulder. "Who is there? You're the only one who knows the way he is."

"Is that a reason we should talk?"

He could smell the scent of her.

" If not here," she said steadily, " I'll come banging on your bedroom door."

She would do it, too.

When she slipped in beside him he drove away. Miraculously, she said nothing. His company was enough. That a beautiful girl in her position should be grateful for such a pitiful crumb of companionship made him feel sorry for her.

He knew where he would take her. The terrain appeared to be flat in all directions, but over by the east fence he knew of a rise, a gentle lift of sand with a cairn in the centre which threw a shadow he could tell the time by. The only " hill " anywhere near Conyers and it meant a lot to him. He had been born and brought up among mountains.

He often sat on his hillock and thought about the cool, high-riding peaks. He had spent his childhood looking up. When he had climbed them he discovered the mountains were not high enough. His reach beyond them had brought him to this desert platform to the stars.

They stood together by the cairn.

" Here lies William Conyer, prospector," he said.

As he spoke an eerie apprehension took hold of him. The girl caught his panic. " What is it? " she cried.

" Nothing," he said. " Just someone walking over my grave."

He could not have said which came first, the words or the unnerving prescience that he would have no grave. Nothing of him, gas or matter, dust or ash, would return to this earth.

Johnny was glad to have the girl with him, surprised by her sensitivity. She calmed as he grew calm, enjoying with him this novel view of Conyers country. She seemed to have forgotten why she had come. Johnny forgot, too. On the rebound from that dire foreknowledge, instantly dismissed, he was thankful to be alive.

" The moon must be like this," she murmured.

It was the end of a beautiful friendship. He remembered who she was and where he was going.

" I'll tell you when I get back," he said harshly.

" You're going in that—that Thing? "

So she hated Clayton's ship.

He stood close to her. " You're jealous of his work," he said. " Why did you marry him? "

She was wary now. " I was tired of fighting off smart alecs. I didn't have to fight Charles Clayton. I had to fight to get him. He lived in a world of his own. I wanted to share it; see what he was seeing."

"And now you don't like what you see?"

"He won't let me. He shuts me out." She shivered. "You heard him. He's always watching me, waiting to catch me with another man."

"Mind if I go home?"

She said all the things she had come to say. "... and it's this place. Hundreds of people caged in a wire fence. The way they treat me... Know what they call our house? The Residence! I had to talk to you. Nobody else knows what he's like. Last month he paired me off with Taggart. It's your turn now and I'm scared."

"I'm just one on the list," Johnny said, "and somehow I'll see to it that I'm the last."

He wondered what it would be like to be guilty of the things Clayton accused him of. She could be his, and she was there at his elbow.

"You're not like the others," she said.

"No brains, uh?"

"You're young and tough, sure of yourself, all the things he's not any more. You've made him come out in the open. Until now he's been careful to hide his crazy jealousy."

Johnny took her shoulders and shook her hard. "You given him any reason?"

She gave her head a proud toss and he believed her.

"You're the one who's cracking up. Clayton happens to be a genius. You're not. Pull yourself together and help him along. Stop worrying over your own mean little problems and see it Clayton's way. You can give him proof there's no one else if you're a real woman, which I doubt."

For one electric moment Johnny thought she was going to convince him by demonstration. He didn't need convincing. He was still holding her.

Her sensual blaze of anger soured. "The way he spoke to you, and you still admire him!"

She had drawn away and he was glad. He had reached escape velocity. She wasn't important. He shot the moon a calculating glance, all fear behind him.

"Clayton will get me where I want to go—and you're not going to stop either of us."

He remembered the white convertible close by the launching ramp and couldn't wait to get her back there...

When he dropped her off she came round to his window and hesitated, holding back the full storm of words that had gathered in the tension between them.

"He'll kill you," she whispered.

Johnny's eyes followed with relief the receding tail lights of her car. That was the only view he wanted of her in future.

What he saw as the headlamps of his own car swung round struck him suddenly cold. That swift glimpse of the stooped figure standing in the mouth of the ramp was still clear before him when he reached his room and persisted into his dreams. It was with him now in the Haybox.

Clayton had been watching . . .

That was a month ago. Oh, at least a month, two months, maybe. Johnny burnt with self-appreciation. This clinched it. There wasn't another pilot with as many rocket hours or hours of grilling in contraptions like this in the whole country—nor in any country—alive to use the experience.

Alive? Who's alive? You are. *I don't feel alive.* You must be or you wouldn't be here. *Who says I'm here?* I do. *Who are you?* J. Royston Brand.

Then who am I?

Must be six months. Just punch that button and they'll tell you what a fine fellow you are.

He resisted.

How did he know he'd beaten McQuade? If there was some way of knowing, some way of fixing a target, he could reach it. Not knowing was the object of the exercise.

His hands didn't work because of the padding. He couldn't feel one finger inside another. He couldn't see because of the mask. A few feet away there were men studying graphs made by his blood-pressure.

He bit his tongue and tasted blood. He bit harder.

Steady. An animal will gnaw off its own leg to free itself from a trap. This wasn't a trap. If he worked himself up they would know. There was a line on the graph, a safety line. If he pushed the needle over it they would haul him out.

Margin of safety. Clayton was tired of safety limits. So was he. He'd told Whelan so.

It wasn't likely that Whelan would let him go on after it was reached, unless Clayton had persuaded him the safety margin was unnecessarily wide.

Don't think about it. But you've been thinking about it. That's all you've been thinking of for—for how long? How long? If I knew how long it would be something to measure by.

How long is a piece of string? *Shut up, damn you.* How high is an empty space? *You bloody clown. I can't think about that. It's too big.* Too big, is it? You're yellow. *I want a grave in the earth, dust to dust. MY dust to the dust of MY earth.* What if

you're out there right now? What if there really was a take-off?

He felt he remembered it vividly as having taken place. But it wasn't the way it should be. Something was wrong. He wasn't in control.

An awed terror smote him, as if he was guilty of an unspeakable enormity. He was out in Nothing. He *was* Nothing.

Just as some unholy entity was about to overwhelm him he became aware, really aware, of a flicker of sensation, a tangible something within himself. Himself as a human being, as a man.

"Nina." The blurred tremor came from inside his tamped ears. "Nina," he said again, repeating it, wild with delight at the picture that came to him, solid as a concrete flyover, his bridge to sanity.

He was thinking again, no matter what. He let his mind run on, not daring to brake or direct for fear he should run off the road again into Nothing.

Nina. His body responded to her image. That's rich, oh, that's rich! Whelan would have a word for it. He looked forward to telling the quack that beyond the fascination of a steel curve is that of a woman. All his training, the fanatical drive of ambition was no more than a brittle crust over his fundamental need. It was a prehistoric finger poking into the space-age pie!

She had called him Johnny. He was J. Royston Brand and she was Nina. That was enough material to keep him going a year.

They were standing by the cairn on the hillock, he was holding her. He teased his fancy by rearranging events, living it over with a difference. There was never going to be any end to it. They'd have to drag him out in time for the launching—and that might be years yet! Whenever he felt himself skidding away he thought of the golden silk of her skin, or was it her dress? She was all gold and shining . . .

He sped down timeless tracks, moving his physical self mechanically when necessary, his mind absorbed elsewhere. Control of the mind be hanged! This was the trick.

The golden road ran out.

He swerved to avoid the object blocking his primrose path. This sudden diversion fixed his identity even more firmly. He was J. Royston Brand all right, clammy and suffocating in the Haybox.

What he had come up against was the stunning remembrance of the last face he had seen before they shut him in.

Clayton.

Clayton had been sitting at the observation panel, was still there, watching him, listening to him.

He had been babbling like a raving lecher, the slightest sound relayed loud and clear to the observer.

He dragged in air but there wasn't enough of it. He knew what was happening. Clayton was killing him. And the devil himself couldn't devise a slower, more awful death.

Blind and deaf—dumb if he screamed, for Clayton could switch him off—he was helpless, utterly at the mercy of the man who sat at the panel controlling the temperature and pressure within the cylinder.

Clayton could find a dozen excuses to be alone in there. No one suspected his jealous mania. His wife had said how careful he had been to hide his obsession. He, Johnny Brand, was the only one Clayton had ever openly accused.

And why not? He was guilty, wasn't he? He had made love to Nina. He remembered it vividly as having taken place.

He roared and strained against every inch of clothing and apparatus, but it was stitched to his skin with red-hot wire. He staggered out of the chair, lunging with demoniacal strength that somehow did no more than feebly wave the blunt flippers of his arms, and always in front of him hung the contorted white face of Clayton. Clayton who had seen him return from a drive with Nina; Clayton who had heard his wildly erotic recital.

He dropped and lay panting. Now he was being lowered into a cauldron of boiling oil, wrapped round and round with a scalding cloth, his winding-sheet. He laughed hysterically. He would have a grave.

The cauldron was swaying slightly on its tripod over the flames.

Swaying.

He remembered where he was. The Haybox was swaying inside the outer shell. He worked with the movement, urging his suspended tomb in its sluggish rise and fall. If he could swing it high enough the metal might smash through the observation panel. Whatever portion of the outer casing it struck it would send a ringing note into the world of light and noise and air.

His lucid moment evaporated in searing steam. He was rolling over and over. Someone was stirring the cauldron with a fiery ladle. No, his rocket plane was blazing and going into a spin. No, no, the ship was disintegrating.

He was falling through illimitable space—nothing into nothing.

No grave for Johnny . . .

The light made him flinch. He groaned and turned away, lying with his eyes shut, still seeing Clayton bending over him, a strange gleam in those piercing eyes.

He was breathing sweet cool air. He could taste it, feel it on

his face, on his hands. His fingers curled and made contact.

He was free.

Power thrilled through his arms, into his bunched fists, ready to smash at that gloating face.

" Congratulations, Brand. Magnificent! "

In astonishment he heard the boyish exuberance of Professor Whelan. Cautiously slitting his eyes he looked up, not into one face but a ring of beaming faces.

J. Royston Brand was in control again.

" How long? " he croaked.

" One hundred and seventy-one hours," Whelan announced.

Johnny worked on it. A week. He had been in the Haybox a mere week.

" Did I talk my fool head off? " he mumbled sheepishly.

" Oh sure! " Whelan told him. " The first few days you had Hefflin tearing his hair every time you ran through a Top Secret blueprint. How'd you get to know all that stuff? "

They began talking among themselves.

" Is that all? " Johnny demanded peevishly.

They hardly had any time for him. Somebody said, " About the fourth day you got the scrambler working. All we heard was monkey talk."

" A dozen times I thought you'd press the buzzer." That was Whelan. " You never did. Not even when you went berserk just now."

Johnny raised himself up on one elbow. He couldn't make out whether he had forgotten the push-button or whether his panic had met with a hard core of stubborn resistance.

" Lie still," Whelan commanded. " The doctor's going to check you over and start you on a normal diet. Then you must get some sleep. Mr. Clayton wanted to get you out last night. You were pushing the graph up, but I told him what you thought about the safety line. I'd have given you another hour now. The chief overruled me."

Johnny held Clayton's eyes.

Now he understood the strangeness: it was acceptance, recognition. He hadn't been alone these past seven days. Clayton had sweated them out with him, and with him had been released from solitude.

They had both forgotten Nina.

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★ ★ ★

OUT TO GRASS

Fortune-hunter: A man who goes widow-shopping.

A DEAL OF PAINT

I threw down a lump of alizarin crimson
—the colour of anger

BY ELISABETH AYRTON

I AM not, as my appearance and profession would suggest, a simple illiterate. True, I have a round face, and my eyes are grey and glassy and more than an eye's width apart, and I am apt, according to Leila, to leave my mouth open when I am thinking, so that, all in all, I give an effect of dumbness. True, also, that I am a painter, and painters nowadays are not really supposed to be able to read or to string words together. I can do both and I enjoy doing both, but not so much as I enjoy painting.

I like to paint. That is the long and short of it. I like painting more than anything else, except obvious things like sex, food, and drink, that all sensible people like. As a painter, I have quite a lot of talent—I'm not sure yet how much—and a fairly complete mastery of most of the technical requirements; that is, I am a good draughtsman, an instinctive colourist, and my textures and spatial relations are not uninteresting.

I have my difficulties—I set myself difficulties—but who does not? I get on fairly well with people, and I ought to be quite as successful as a dozen other painters—all of my acquaintance, since the art world is very small—but I am not. I never have been since my very first one-man show with Garrard at the Rutland Gallery when I was discovered by the critics, taken up—and very quickly put down again—by C.C. himself and sold out.

" Sold out " is the just phrase. I was twenty-two after that show. Apart from quite a lot of money, in my terms at least, I had one oil left, three drawings, and a very small amount of commonsense, my most valuable remaining possession, since the oil and the drawings were all rather substandard. The commonsense prevented me from believing what the critics and a lot of other people said and considering myself a genius, and not only a genius but a painter who would always be able to live by painting exactly what he wanted to paint when he wanted to paint it.

I did, however, think that I could probably afford to marry Leila, rent my own studio, and stop being a student. All this

was all right, except the last. If I had gone on being a student I could have been sent to Rome free on a grant which would have kept me for a year and even left something over for Leila. As it was, I didn't get to Italy till three years ago, paying my own and Leila's way entirely and staying only three months because we were broke. As we still are and have been ever since.

I have never had another show which sold like that first one, although I am a better painter than I was then. The work I did in Italy was shown on my return and I only sold three pictures. My work is as contemporary as any; of course it is; how can anyone intelligent and honest paint behind his time, deliberately or by accident? But it is what the French call "figuratif," which is to say that it has as its starting-point some natural appearance; and the élite of the art world, the critics and the groups which count, are going more and more for the subjective approach—by which they really mean the abnormal subject's subjective approach when he is trying to be as different from anyone else as he can possibly make himself—which leads to what is called Action Painting and Other Art.

And that leaves me out on a limb by myself. I see things much as everyone else does as far as I can make out, but fairly intensely, I hope, and sometimes I see peculiarly exciting patterns and relationships between shapes and colours of objects. Anyway, it has been clear ever since that first sell-out show that I have a corny old way of seeing things and am really an academic, whatever that term has come to mean. My second show went fairly well because Other Art had not then got very far. But ever since . . . Not that I don't sell a certain amount privately. I do. To the uneducated and even the half-educated my work seems to give a good deal of pleasure.

However, in the last two years things have got very tight. And since last year we have become fairly desperate. We can't pay the quarter's rent and we can't afford not to, so something had to be done. Hence my applying for a most unsympathetic job which was in the gift of my uncle. I got it. Start next Monday . . .

When I got back from the interview, Leila was sitting in the studio, which she rarely does, it being a working-room entirely. She said, "Hi, Bill. You'll never guess what's happened."

I thought it was something ultimately awful because she hadn't even asked me about the job. I said, "What?"

"Garrard came—just before lunch." Garrard is my dealer, and I'd been trying to get him to come and look at my work and arrange for a show for the last year. Dealers!

I sat down and asked Leila what he wanted.

"He came because there's a Mrs. Spencer Thompson who's interested in having you paint a small portrait of her daughter. She's American and very rich, and Garrard made it fairly clear—this was at the beginning—that he couldn't understand why, but she wants a portrait and she wants you to paint it."

"Very nice of her. She must have seen one of the early portraits. Did you make Garrard look at the work? Did he say anything about a show?"

Leila went bright pink and stretched her eyes much too wide open, as she does when she's embarrassed. She said, "It's the most extraordinary thing. It's really awfully funny, I suppose, but I think you'll be furious. I was just cleaning up in here a bit, as you were out—"

I said, "I wish you *wouldn't*. The still life on the easel's wet—it doesn't want a lot of dust sticking to the surface."

This is what I always say when Leila cleans the studio, and while I was saying it I looked round for the first time. The studio, rather unfortunately, has a parquet floor, and to protect it I have a large piece of hardboard in front of my easel to catch the worst blobs and drips of paint.

Just before I started this present big still life which is nearly finished, I'd picked up the board and scraped it, because it was getting very encrusted and I kept stepping in lumps of paint and treading them off on to the floor. Then I put it down again and it had collected a good deal of fresh paint in the course of the present piece of work. But now it wasn't on the floor at all. It was on the easel and my still life was leaning against the wall.

I said, "Good God! What on earth? Leila!" and jumped up to take it off the easel and throw it on the floor again and make sure my *Jars in a Window*—which was coming along rather well—was all right.

Leila jumped up too and stood between me and the easel.

"Bill, listen a minute. It's Garrard. Not me. Of course I wouldn't."

"Garrard? What *do* you mean?"

"He was looking at the pictures, being very dim and explaining how the gallery was booked up for a year and how he couldn't really promise you a show till 1961 and saying, 'Mm,' to each picture instead of, 'Ah,' like he does when he likes them, and suddenly he saw the—the drips-board leaning against the wall..."

"What was it doing there?"

"I told you, I was cleaning. I'd picked it up to sweep underneath it. He said, 'Ah,' at once, and then he stepped back and said, 'Ah ha!' with his head on one side.

"And then he turned to me and said, 'Leila, my dear, I'm very glad to have this opportunity to talk to you with Bill not here. I thought—I felt—that there must be something like this. Tell me—why is he holding out on us?'"

I saw it all, but I couldn't really believe it. It was too rich.

"He didn't really think it was an abstract?"

"He did. He not only thought it was an abstract, he thought it was wonderful. He said he'd always known you had it in you, as soon as you caught up with contemporary thought. That was why he'd never worried you, and always tried to help us keep going. You can't hurry genius. And he'd known you were that ever since he gave you your first show."

We rocked with laughter. I moved to take the board off the easel again.

Leila held my arm. "Listen, Bill. He wants to buy it."

"Buy it? Didn't you tell him?"

She opened her eyes again. "No, I didn't. I couldn't, really. I suppose I should have, but it would have made him look too silly. He'd have hated us for ever after. I just said I didn't think you'd sell it."

"I sure won't."

"He said he wasn't surprised you wanted to hold on to it. But could he see some more? Any others you'd got. He said it was marvellous how you'd got the Tachist quality—real action painting and yet restrained by some sort of inner discipline; and certain almost Constructivist passages. He said it took genius to take the best from several schools like that and make something quite new, and he was going to throw out his whole schedule to show your new work in the autumn."

"No. It's too absurd."

She began to pirouette, quoting Garrard as she spun. "'And now, Leila, my dear, show me the rest. I'm agog. Is there enough for a full show? When did this start?'"

"No!"

"Yes, I tell you. So I said—I'm sorry, Bill, but I couldn't think what to do—that you were cagey about them and had told me not to let anyone see them, but I'd tell you what he said.

"He said, 'I'll ring him up this afternoon. Leila, my dear, I must go now, but I want you to know how splendid, how really splendid, this development is in your husband's work. I'm sure you do know, because you're one of the intelligent wives. Tell me, how many canvases are there?'

"I said I didn't know. And he sighed and said, 'Ah, well. He ought to be able to manage a show next spring at the latest. Tell him I'll be ringing him, and tell him not to waste time with

the portrait. It's not worth his while. And this one—if he should want to part with it, I'll buy it myself. That'll show him what I think of the new work.' That's absolutely accurate word for word reporting, Bill. I've been sitting here going over it to make sure I wasn't mad or anything."

We were both quite silent and serious for a minute as we thought about it. I stood in front of the easel and looked at the board carefully. Of course, Garrard was absurd and he had made the gaffe of a lifetime—the opposite gaffe from those critics who ridiculed the early Impressionists in Paris—but there were two points in his favour and one of them was, in a way, against me.

The first point is that colour sings easily for me; my difficulties lie with form in space. This board had only the droppings from the palette I was using for one picture, and so the sharp lemon chrome sang to a chord of cadmium red and twanged to a fierce lime green with viridian in it. And the high gloss black enamel I'd been using had run in beautiful long trickles and was balanced by a lump of ultramarine I'd dropped yesterday and scraped up rather untidily because I was in a hurry. That was all right. If the board had been on the floor through two or three paintings, the colour wouldn't have looked so good.

The slightly doubtful part, as far as I was concerned, was that I'd been reading something about Action Painting in America at breakfast yesterday and when I came in to the studio I was, I thought, in the necessary emotional condition for this curious activity, the emotion being anger and a sort of despair.

So, really only to annoy myself, I threw a lump of alizarin crimson, the colour of anger, down on to the board, and ground it around hard into the board with the long marl. And then I threw down a lump of lemon chrome and stamped in it and worked it around a bit with my foot and made a long slide mark transversely on the board.

At no time did I bend down to it as it lay on the floor. And then I was ashamed of myself for being so childish, and anyway that is not the way one wastes good paint, which is expensive; or the way one thinks of surfaces and paint in relation to each other. So I went on with my *Jars in a Window*, feeling sick and sad.

But you see, it meant that the board on the floor wasn't entirely an accident. Some kind of emotional purpose had gone into it. Which is what the action painters claim. And perhaps Garrard had felt it—perhaps it does communicate . . .

Leila doesn't know about this.

So now what shall I do? What a thing to find lying in wait for you on your return from taking a white-collar job at eleven

pounds a week. Because this board is big, forty inches by fifty. Even at my present prices, I shouldn't sell for under three hundred, Garrard knows that. I could probably get four out of him. And it wouldn't be selling out—or would it?—to let him have this one accidental one. Yes, of course, it would. And I can't paint him thirty more for an exhibition.

I could, of course. I could paint six by this evening and show them to him tomorrow.

And they might be very interesting and surprising if they conveyed the mixture of emotions I feel at this moment.

© Elisabeth Ayrton 1960

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TECHNICAL HITCH

In the operating room there were whispered introductions . . . A huge, complicated machine, connected to the operating table, with many tubes and wires, began at this moment to go pocketa-pocketa-pocketa.

"The new anaesthetizer is giving way!" shouted an interne. "There is no one in the East who knows how to fix it!"

"Quiet, man!" said Mitty, in a low, cool voice. He sprang to the machine, which was now going pocketa-pocketa-pocketa-queep-pocketa-queep. He began fingering delicately a row of glistening dials. "Give me a fountain pen!" he snapped.

Someone handed him a fountain pen. He pulled a faulty piston out of the machine and inserted the pen in its place. "That will hold for ten minutes," he said. "Get on with the operation."

A nurse hurried over and whispered to Renshaw, and Mitty saw the man turn pale.

"Coreopsis has set in," said Renshaw nervously. "If you would take over, Mitty?"

JAMES THURBER, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*

MOTOR ATAXY

My flywheel is fluid
My bodywork's sleek;
And I've split-axle
Hydro-pneumatic suspension;
It seems such a pity
My driving technique
Doesn't quite equal
This wondrous invention.

NICHOLAS DEE

BOX OF CIGARS

This is the way things are,
he thought suddenly

BY RICHARD SULLIVAN

WHEN he came out of his house at mid morning that late May Saturday, Tom Barnaby, in middle age, coaxing his aged bulldog into a walk, was struck all at once by the delicacy and profusion of spring.

The two locust trees at the corner of the yard leaned together under their intermingled spray of flickering green and white; the purple iris stood as if posed in the still, fresh morning; and the lawn was covered with an abundance of fallen tan maple seeds.

Perpendicular each one, point down they stood by thousands, tens of thousands erect in his grass; and he admired them profoundly as beneficent, yet with the dim foreboding that he might have to rake them up, for the grass's sake—imagine every one of them growing into a maple tree, and this a forest!—and he dragged at the leash of the aged bulldog, murmuring, "Come on now, boy. Come on, Samson."

For with the aged one must be insistent but gentle. Samson, who had had his high and dramatic moments, lived now by love alone. He had survived ulcers, seizures, fights, falls, heart attacks, moments of misunderstanding, and the annual summer endurance of thunderstorms, with all the rest that honourable dogs endure; and he had survived as an arthritic, companionable old animal whose memory apparently failed often but whose dignity and simple creatureliness made him dear.

Barnaby tugged sternly but with true love at the bulldog's leash; and a new maple seed twirled down right in front of his face, so that he dodged aside; and Samson, snuffling, came hippity-hop down the porch steps.

Once man and dog had ranged wide about the town. But Samson could no longer take even a short jaunt without slowing up and heavy puffing. These shorter, slower walks gave Barnaby a chance to know his own neighbours more thoroughly; this he liked.

Yet on this particular May morning, even more than the sight

of Mrs. Morris' plump, full-grown but unquestionably retarded son George, on a ladder, painting the wall white carefully; even more than the sight of old Mrs. Morris herself, upended in the garden as she dipped to finger with love the rising, tender sweet alyssum; even more than the now-empty house of old Mr. Pettrucci, who had played the clarinet sometimes into the dead of night, atrociously, winter and summer, God rest him, though in the summer it was worse with all the windows open.

Even more than all these Barnaby this morning felt moved and pierced by the faintly-swaying long-stalked coral-bells in the old bed at the side of the high-grassed, unmown Pettrucci garden, where a hummingbird with an iridescent red throat was hovering in a dazzle of pale sun, pumping and battering the flowers.

And then all over all the lawns lay the thrusting, perpendicular maple seeds, demanding in delicate profusion to be born.

This urgency, thought Barnaby, this drive and abundance, this—this showing forth. As he guided Samson—or was guided?—he felt simple adoration rise in him like desire. The whole block this morning was radiant, like a shimmering and balmy revelation; and Barnaby, tugging Samson, adored, as possibly Samson in his own way adored. It was that kind of sacramental May morning. Ineffable, with lace and grace on the tree limbs and power and glory in the lovely leaf-spattered sky.

But Samson boggled at the back lane. He couldn't manage the whole block on such a morning. It was too alive a journey for an old dog. He tugged and snorted and turned at the lane, wanting to go home and to the sleep he lived in, these days, twenty hours out of twenty-four.

But Barnaby insisted. Down the lane lay the back garden of a family he admired. The two little Desmond girls reminded him, not because of real resemblance but purely because they were little girls with crisply-tied bows on their neatly-plaited hair, of what his own daughters, now grown to women, had once been.

Harry Desmond, who had something to do with electronic calculating machines, was a man Barnaby knew only slightly but liked profoundly. He was a fresh, bubbling, eager, compact young man with brown eyes, pink cheeks, and an abundant pride in his daughters. It was this pride in daughters which perhaps primarily endeared young Harry Desmond to Barnaby, who had no sons. Walking his bulldog these past two years, Barnaby had occasionally stopped to chat with Harry Desmond in the front garden, or even in the back garden.

But the back garden, this one on the lane, he had avoided ever since, last summer, he had come upon young Mrs. Desmond, in pale blue shorts and bright red sun-top, fiercely weeding a dismal

little flowerbed in which only a pair of willowy pink petunias bloomed, amid a jungle of high grass stems and three unmistakable and gigantic milkweeds. Her obvious fervour had touched him; it is always good to see a human being concentrating earnestly on something; and she was—in red, pale blue, and leggy gold—clearly dedicated to her work of digging up tulip bulbs: a pile of them lay in the grass beside her.

He had paused in the lane, walking Samson that day, knowing her, he thought, knowing her husband, already admiring her daughters, one of whom was at that moment just coming out of the back door. He had paused and said approvingly, "Well—hullo!"

On hands and knees she had glanced at him under her right armpit; then she jumped to her feet, hitched at her sloping sun-top, grabbed at her belt, glared, and fiercely strode away.

Her long bare golden legs moved like scissors; her bare golden shoulders swung militantly high. With indignation he knew exactly what she thought of him.

And it irritated him intensely to be taken so assuredly as a middle-aged lecher, crawling up to stare at a pretty young scantily-clothed woman. He didn't mind being known for what he was, but he didn't relish being taken for what he was not. So thereafter out of sheer pride he avoided going past the Desmonds' back garden.

When he saw young Mrs. Desmond in the front garden he spoke only when her husband or the little girls made a greeting general. The affront she had given him endured, though he realised in time that she must, knowing him a little better, regret—if she remembered it at all—her early show of outrage. But he could not forget. Even this past late winter and early spring, when he had seen her as magnificently pregnant, he had refused to take what might have been a pseudo-grandfatherly interest, though he did hope, liking her husband and remembering, that this time it might be a boy.

So now at the lane, out of proud habit, he contended with Samson who wanted to cut through and diminish the walk by half. Yanking at the leash, Barnaby was winning, when a fierce little terrier whose existence he had forgotten came snarling and snapping into the attack.

A reddish little monster with a thick wavy coat and a rowdy manner, this terrier darted at Samson, stopped stiff-legged six feet away, yapped at Barnaby and retreated, to dart in again, not at the bulldog but at Barnaby, who shouted and kicked.

The terrier ran. Barnaby stooped over his own dog. Ten years ago Samson would have trampled such a terrier down before

biting in deep and tossing the thing, whatever it was, like a rat.

Five years ago Samson would have wheeled bowlegged with his flanks low and then would have muscled in like a shark turning up for the throat-hold. He had been in his day a beautiful fighter, old Samson, on the occasions when Barnaby hadn't been able to stop him from fighting.

But now he simply stood facing the terrier—which had backed into its own front garden, twenty feet away, where it growled, bristling with hysterical bravado. He didn't even growl back.

Barnaby felt the moment to be historic—and pathetic. He patted Samson. "Come on," he said. "We'll go home." He started down the proudly neglected lane.

Ahead he saw young Desmond hurriedly crossing his own back-yard, carrying something. He flung what he was carrying—a box—on to the faintly-smoking bonfire at the edge of his garden.

Barnaby waved, but the younger man seemed not to see him. He ran across the garden into the back door of the house. Samson, whose reactions were always slow, turned, growled, and plunged towards the now invisible but still yapping terrier.

"No!" cried Barnaby. "This way! Heel! Come on now!"

And he managed to soothe the ancient bulldog into progress down the lane.

At the Desmonds' bonfire, richly smoking, Barnaby paused; for the smoke had flavour and aroma. The box just thrown in on top of the smouldering fire was a box of cigars; and it had come open, so that all its fat round long brown pointed contents lay there in red-and-gold bands, slowly burning on the embers below. Not one cigar was missing. It was a full box. Barnaby, passing, pausing, glancing, wondered why young Desmond in his right mind would ever throw away a full box of fine cigars.

And then Barnaby in middle age on this fine May morning, walking his poor old bulldog, had an awful apprehension. It dropped him into a depth of the kind of anticipatory agony we all occasionally endure for somebody else, feeling it, sharing it, even though a thousand times removed.

Down the lane ahead of him he saw Loretta Millane, shrewd spinster beyond deceit or deception, teacher (retired) of history, round-shouldered, plump, and peering. Now seeing her in her garden, peering, he knew what he would have to ask and what she would surely answer. What he felt was not quite dread but a kind of awful fascination; and he wished he could feel some clear, appropriate, definable emotion at a time like this.

"Morning, Loretta."

"Are there forty bushels of maple seeds in your front garden this year?" she demanded.

"Closer to fifty."

"Such a litter!" she said. "But I do admire their persistence."

"Loretta, do you know this young Desmond family?"

"Oh, I had her in my class, and she was such a bright girl."

"What has happened?"

Loretta, pudgy, turned away and turned back; the pale sun glinted on her thick glasses. "Well, last night I heard the ambulance. They took her to the hospital and the baby came early and it died. And she died, last night. Keep that dog away from me!"

"He won't hurt you. Was it a boy or a girl?"

"A boy."

"Dear good God," said Barnaby, and he looked back down the lane, where the smoke was getting thick and blue. He yanked at Samson. "Come along now. Au revoir, Loretta."

He strode towards home, trusting Loretta to understand his haste. Walking with the old dog beside him, he thought of that box of presentation cigars burning, of the chaste young woman he had startled last summer, digging up her tulip bulbs, and of young Desmond's manner just now, running across the yard, in mourning for a golden wife and a lost son; he thought of the two unmothered girls with the neat crisp bows on their plaits.

And over him as he hurried home the leaves made a soft green lisping sound; a squirrel whisked to the far side of a tree trunk; a blue jay screeched and a robin chirped; everywhere, on all the lawns, on the pavements, the kerbs, in the street, lay the profusion of maple seeds, browning in the sunlight, dying, yet insistent, sacramental.

This is the way things are, he thought suddenly, with the fierce exultation of one making a discovery; this—but now he remembered calmly that he had felt this grief and this wonder many times before—this, dear God, is how it is to live. What a man must do is get used to it.

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 7, *Waverley.* 8, *Uncles.* 9, *Anti.* 10, *Tied houses.* 13, *Additional.* 16, *Shot.* 18, *Proctor.* 19, *General.* 20, *Ales.* 22, *Advertiser.* 25, *Transports.* 28, *Mope.* 29, *Warren.* 30, *Marathon.*

Down. 1, *Banned.* 2, *Gemini.* 3, *Blot.* 4, *Eyre.* 5, *Bushel* 6, *Scouts.* 11, *Iron rod.* 12, *Settler.* 13, *Asphalt.* 14, *Drone.* 15, *Augment.* 17, *Harms.* 21, *Sundry.* 22, *Append.* 23, *Inmate.* 24, *Employ.* 26, *Rime.* 27, *Surd.*

TIMBERBEAST

By

Verne Athanas

THEY sat at the corner table in Nick's and they hadn't finished their pasta, which was surprising, for Nick's was justly famous for pasta and inspired sauces.

Barbara moved her wineglass a bit with her fingertips. She looked at Jerry and he looked back at her. Neither said anything, because it was that way with them now; they didn't need anything except to sit and look across the table at each other.

He didn't look like a timberbeast, Barbara thought. He looked like a good college fullback, which he had been; his dark hair was cut short, he wore good clothes, and wore them well. He was, she thought, as big and ruggedly handsome and masculine a man as she had ever known. When he smiled, his teeth were startlingly white against his deep weathered tan.

" Now what are you thinkin', kitten? " he asked softly.

Almost irrelevantly she said, " Do you enjoy being a timberbeast, Jerry? "

" Of course, kitten. It's my line of work. You know, you're beautiful. Let's get out of here. I want to kiss you."

" But isn't it dangerous? "

He grinned. " I'm a dangerous man.";

She flushed. " I mean your work, silly. Isn't being a high-climber awfully dangerous? "

" Nothin' to it," he said. " You shinny up a tree, lop the top out of it, and you hang yourself a bull block and some guy wires, and there you are. It's just a high stump, really—seventy-five or eighty feet."

" But," she objected, " you did get hurt. I know, remember? "

" Didn't even lose a day's work," he said. " And let's not change the subject. Let's—"

Nick himself was drifting ponderously by. He said severely

"Whatsa matta you don' eat you pasta? Sometheena wrong?"

"No, Nick, fine. Everything's fine."

"Mebbe you like dessert?"

Jerry said in amused exasperation, "Nick, old buddy. Go away. Can't you see I want to talk to my girl?"

Nick looked startled, then smiled brilliantly. "Shu," he said. He turned the smile on Barbara. "Nize. Poorty, too. You 'scusa me; I bring more wine, eh?"

Barbara flushed, then laughed. Nothing she had ever known had prepared her much for Jerry, and it seemed that most of the people he knew could be just as disconcerting.

Jerry's eyes were on her intently, and he said, suddenly sober; "Barby." His hands covered hers, completely, on the table.

"Yes?" She felt the warmth that always came on her when he touched her.

"Barby, I'm not shooting a line. I mean this. I've knocked around a little, and got my Army time in. Maybe I'm kind of a meathead, but I'm a top man in my line of work, and I make top money. Maybe I've waited a little longer than most, but I never got serious about anyone before. I think you're the one, Barby. And that leaves only one more thing to know. What do you think?"

She looked at him. She thought of the very first time she'd seen him, rather frighteningly huge and burly and dirty and brash, lying on the table in the examination room while Doctor Cresset stitched a dreadful, gaping axe-cut in his leg.

She was Doctor Cresset's surgery nurse, and she'd helped as much as she could, while Jerry lay as stoic as an Indian, only a faint shine of perspiration showing that he was being hurt. She was a tall girl, well made and trim in her white uniform. She wore no cap on her copper-coloured hair, for she was not a registered nurse. She knew he was watching her as she moved about the room, and had no trouble recalling him when he came back a week later to have the stitches taken out.

He was again wearing his working clothes—hickory shirt and black jeans stiff with pitch, stagged off calf-high, held up by heavy braces two inches wide; he came padding in in thick wool socks because he'd left his enormous logger boots, their soles bristling with steel calks, outside the door.

He asked her for a date. She coolly and definitely refused him. Surprisingly he threw back his head and laughed. "I don't blame you," he said, looking down at himself. "But honest, I won't be wearin' this riggin'."

"Well, thanks," she said calmly, "but no, thanks. And good-bye."

"Not good-bye," he said firmly. "I'll be around." For some reason her eyes followed him as he left.

Next day he had shown up at the bank and introduced himself to her father, as if it was the most normal thing in the world to inform the cashier of the town bank that you intend to call on his daughter at his home, which was exactly what Jerry did.

As promised, he wasn't wearing his " rigging." He wore a suit at least as good as those her father wore, and his white shirt was immaculate, his shoes impeccably polished. While she was still gaping at this transformation, she found herself whisked off to Kelly's for steaks. This, now, at Nick's, was their third date in as many weeks.

She looked at him. He was still big and brash and sometimes oddly disconcerting. And he was much, much more. She said slowly, thoughtfully, " What do I think? I think so, too, Jerry. Yes—I think this is it."

He said swiftly, huskily, almost growling it, " Let's get out of here! "

Nick, coming with a tall slender bottle, said in a startled voice, " 'Ey, where you go, eh? "

Jerry slapped a note into the hand not holding the bottle, and shook it vigorously. " Why," he said delightedly, " we're going to get married, old buddy! "

" Well," said Nick philosophically, " when you don' eat you pasta, can't stop for 'nother bottle wine—maybe is better you get married." He gave them both his most brilliant smile. " When you come back is ever'theenga onna house. Wedding present from old Nick. And good luck, eh? Long life. Lotsa bambinos."

Jerry grinned widely. " We'll be back and let you know," he promised.

They were married within the month. The wedding was beautiful; the honeymoon thoroughly satisfactory. Their homecoming was strange, in a way: coming back to her father's house—a quick visit and a gathering up of the boxes and bundles of last-minute things—and then home to Iverson Logging Company's Camp Nine.

It was roughly-fifty miles from Galeysburg across the mountains. Twenty miles from Galeysburg a dirt road met the highway, at Gavrin's Pass. At the end of twenty miles of this rough dirt road lay Camp Nine; two streets bulldozed out of the thick-timbered slope for the board-and-batten family houses, and Brass Collar Row, a shorter street of double-sized shacks. Beyond the enormous cookhouse and camp offices lay the bunkhouses of the single or detached men, and shops and commissariat and storehouses.

Home was one of the single cabins—a bedroom, a living-room, a kitchen, and bathroom, with a porch tacked on at the kitchen end. Someone had scrubbed and swept it to gleaming cleanliness, and with the bride's curtains at the too-few, too-small windows, and loose covers on the third-hand furniture, and the wedding-gift tufted spread on the big double bed, it was a very special little cottage in a street of similar cabins.

" So it's a shack," said Jerry expansively. " With you in it, princess, it's a palace." He set her down after carrying her ceremoniously over the threshold, kissed her with conviction, and departed to pick up things he'd left at the bunkhouse.

He returned shortly to dump a double armload of stuff on the porch; tin hat and Mackinaw coat and raincoat and heavy calked boots. She was given to understand that they were cork boots—a t mberbeast never called them calks. Then she demanded, " And what are those filthy things? "

Jerry said, " Those are my working trousers, ma'am. Why? "

" Well, they certainly could stand washing! "

He cried in a tone as horrified as if she had suggested setting fire to his grandmother, " Wash my working trousers? Woman, have you gone stark staring mad? Why, they're just barely pitched enough so's a jagger won't snatch 'em clean off me now! "

She looked at him dazedly. " What's a jagger? "

He grinned and gathered her in and kissed her tenderly on the tip of her nose. " Kitten, you've a hundred years to learn to talk timberbeast. Now what do you say we check our new domicile? "

The cabin, it seemed, was designed for something about halfway between camping out and playing house. The bathroom was just that: a cubicle perhaps four feet square, floored with galvanised metal and a rough wooden-slat arrangement, with two cast-iron handles and a shower head above. There was a galvanised tank in the corner of the kitchen in which water, heated by coils in the firebox of the kitchen range, was stored. There was a kitchen sink and a hand basin, and out on the bit of a porch was a perfectly good non-automatic washing machine which could be filled via a hose connected to the kitchen-sink taps.

Barbara looked somewhat dubiously at Jerry. " Maybe you'd better give me that palace bit again," she said.

Jerry grinned approvingly. " Stout girl. Just do it like this. Close your eyes and say to yourself, ' I am a princess; this is my palace,' and when you open your eyes, bingo!—the whole thing turns into a pumpkin! " Then he grabbed her up, twirled her, and put her down, helpless with laughter. In that glow it was a wonderful little house.

Next door lived George and Nora Summers. George was big—all these timberbeasts were enormous, it seemed—and George was big and quiet and dryly humorous. Nora was fair and pretty and quick and somewhat harassed by three youngsters all under four years of age. Nora was a marvel. She knew who had an icebox for sale, and which camp boy could be depended on to haul ice from the camp store in a coaster wagon. She knew all about dampers and draughts and generally how to manage the sullen, black wood-burning kitchen range. She even knew about shivarees.

That happened the third evening after they moved in. Jerry and George clattered off in George's noisy pickup, came back before dark to dump case after case of beer and soft drinks in the non-automatic washing machine and a couple of galvanised tubs donated by Nora. Two enormous boxes of food went into the kitchen. Jerry looked round the tiny living-room.

" Better get those fragile things down," he said, " and the shelves, and put 'em in the bedroom. And lock the bedroom."

"I take it," said Barbara, "that we're going to have a party."

Jerry said half grimly, "We're about to be shivareed."

"What's that, and how do you know?"

"A bird told me. A big black burly bird. It's a kind of a housewarming, timberbeast style. I'd suggest you get your face on straight, wear something that won't rip easily, and then relax and ride with it. Just take a deep breath and have fun."

Despite advance warning, Barbara screamed and leapt about a foot at the first crash of sound. There was a continuing horrifying racket of enthusiastic bell-ringing and washtub-beating, plus the skyward blasting of a shotgun. There was even an inspired cymbalist in the crowd, banging happily away with a pair of dustbin lids. When Jerry opened the door, it seemed to her he was washed back by a veritable tide of timberbeasts and timberbeasts' wives and timberbeasts' children.

They were friendly, though a trifle loud, and as the evening wore on and the beer vanished, they grew louder. About midnight a halfhearted attempt was made to kidnap the bride, an attempt broken up by Nora and a couple of other women, armed with brooms.

A somewhat more serious attempt was made to kidnap the bridegroom, and a short, noisy, and exceedingly violent battle started between the porch and the woodshed, where Jerry and George stood back to back, dealing out half-laughing, half-serious cuffs and blows that would have strained muscles and cracked bones in lesser men.

About two o'clock the shivaree began to die a natural death. Timberbeasts' wives, who had already tucked their children in, began to coax, cajole, and in some cases almost drag timberbeast husbands away. Nora stayed long enough to stack dishes and promise help on the morrow.

Jerry, who had lost every button and one of the pockets off his shirt, hunted for a cigarette, and groaned half happily, half dismally, "Why, oh why, did I have to be such a gay dog when my old buddies got married off?"

Barbara managed a smile. She unlocked the bedroom door, went in and fell across the bed, bounced off and screamed. Someone had managed to get into the room and wire a cowbell to the bedsprings.

This timberbeast's world was like nothing she had ever known. Jerry rose at an impossibly early hour, ate enough breakfast for two men, and departed, his bright tin hat cocked at a go-to-hell tilt, his lunch-bucket under one arm; Jerry enormous in hickory shirt and stiffly-pitched trousers, his cork boots clumping and crunching as he walked. She soon came to know that logger stride, the stiff-ankled step with an almost dainty catlike lift of the foot so as not to hang up the corks on the forward reach. Apart from which, these timberbeasts were about as dainty as bulldozers.

He came home late in the afternoon, sweaty as a carthorse, dirt-crusted, a clownish clean area round mouth and eyes, recognisable

only by his white grin, happily tired and impossibly hungry, and what he wanted wasn't cool salad, no matter how stifling hot it might be, but slabs of meat and mounds of potatoes and plenty of whatever else went with that foundation.

Barbara also discovered that Jerry meant what he said—that she quite literally was never to wash his pitchy jeans. They went from counter to grave without benefit of baptism. Yet he used up clean working shirts almost as fast as she could wash and iron them.

She increased her vocabulary with a fascinating assortment of words, including " catface " and " jilpoke " and " molly hogan." Then there were the ubiquitous " corks," " widow-makers," and " skid road."

A widow-maker was a limb or chunk caught high in the limbs of another tree, and timberbeast tradition had it that an honest-to-John widow-maker would hang for six weeks, waiting for someone to walk under it. The skid road was what the old horse-loggers and bull-punchers had brought their logs in on, and it was the section of town where the old loggers were wont to hang out, and the only people who called it " skid row " were a bunch of sorry scissorbills who didn't know a bull block from a cant hook. Or so she was informed.

Then there was the humidity. Low humidity meant increased fire hazard, and with too low humidity the woods operation was simply shut down for the rest of the day. The first time it happened Jerry was home before noon, which was fine, but next morning the alarm clock made its racket two hours before its unreasonable normal. Barbara looked at it blurrily, groaned dismally, and hauled the bedclothes over her head again.

It didn't do any good. Jerry, who woke at any hour chipper and full of beans, was up and dressed and loudly declaiming that he was a growing boy in need of his breakfast.

Barbara snarled at him. She was instantly sorry, but there it was.

The third time Jerry shook her, vigorously, she snarled at him good and loud and long.

" Well, all right! " said Jerry, retiring to the kitchen.

Contrite, but still feeling too inhuman to state it, she got up and took over making breakfast. By the time she'd had her second cup of coffee, Jerry was ready for work.

He leaned to kiss her, rather tentatively, and she was sorry enough about her behaviour to kiss him with so much fervour that he came up for air and said in mock alarm, " Hey, I've got to go to work! " She smacked him, but not very hard, and it was all right again.

When she thought he was gone, he suddenly stuck his tin-hatted head back in the kitchen door and whispered hoarsely, " Hey, beautiful, if you can duck that ugly old man of yours, how's about me comin' round to see you tonight, hey? "

She threw her dishcloth at him, and he left, shouting gleefully. Sometimes she wondered what the neighbours thought.

She thought she heard the hooting of the crew speeder early in the afternoon, but the timberbeasts did not appear. Then Nora came across the narrow dirt yard separating the two houses.

"That was an ambulance going up towards the shop," she said.

A cold hand grasped at Barbara's heart. "An ambulance?" she said stupidly. "Where would an ambulance—? I mean, why?"

"Have to come from town," said Nora. "Somebody's hurt."

Barbara said, dry-throated, "You mean, in the woods, somebody was hurt, is that it? Would they—ought we to—?"

Nora gave her an almost convincing smile. "They'd—somebody would let us know, if—" She didn't say if what. Barbara looked up the dusty street. There was someone coming. It was—dear God, it was—it was Jerry. He wasn't carrying his lunch-bucket. He walked slowly, his tin hat was shoved back on his head as he came to the kitchen porch. Without looking at each other the women went to meet him.

Barbara had to swallow before she spoke. "Jerry," she said, "Jerry, what is it?"

Jerry looked at them. He said quite clearly and matter-of-factly, "Damn it!" Then he took off his tin hat and hurled it the length of the porch, where it hit something, bottle or glass jar, and shattered it.

In a hard, controlled voice, Nora said, "Is it George? Is it George, Jerry?"

Jerry looked up as if he hadn't seen them before. "No," he said quickly. "No, it isn't George, Nora. He's all right."

"Then what?" said Barbara. "What is it, Jerry?"

"It was Mick," said Jerry. "Damn it, the fool knew better than to stand in like that. He ought to know he could get killed like that! Brought the turn in to the deck, and I knocked the bells loose and gave the donkey puncher the thumb, and he picked 'em up, and that crazy Mick standing right there when one of the chokers hung and the log rolled!"

Barbara remembered Mick. A particular friend of Jerry's, rough and gruff and oddly shy, and no more harm in him than in a collie pup. She liked him.

She said unbelievingly, "He's—he's dead, Jerry? Mick is?"

Jerry said fiercely, "That's what I said, wasn't it? The crazy fool, he—" He sat down suddenly on the porch steps and crossed his arms on his knees and dropped his head to his arms.

Barbara stared helplessly down at him. Nora drew back, taking Barbara with her.

"Come on," Nora said. "I imagine he'll want to be alone a little while. Those big tough ones hate to have anybody see 'em hurtin'. I'll get you that bottle George thinks he's got hid out on me, and after a while you get a drink and some grub into him and he'll be all right."

Not knowing what else to do, Barbara went along. They heard the log train whistle for the camp crossing, and a few minutes later

the timberbeasts came straggling home, clumping quietly in their cork boots, without their normal chaffing.

When Barbara went home, Jerry was in the shower. He ate a silent supper, then announced he was going over to the bunkhouses for a while. He came back late.

She awoke during the night and knew somehow he was not sleeping. "Jerry?" she said, tentatively and sleepily.

Almost harshly, he said, "Go to sleep, kitten. Go to sleep."

They made the fifty-mile drive to the city for the funeral, which was attended by perhaps a dozen of the other timberbeasts. Mick, it seemed, had no family, and the service was short, conducted by a minister who had never known Mick, the whole thing handled by equally impersonal, if skilled, professionals.

Jerry and the others sat through it quietly and properly and soberly. When it was all over, Jerry gave Barbara some money and suggested she might have some shopping to do, and then promptly disappeared. He showed up at their usual hotel-lobby rendezvous hours later, in the company of three other timberbeasts, and they were, to put the matter as kindly as possible, not entirely sober.

Jerry ushered her and his friends to the car with great dignity and gravity, handed her the keys, and climbed in.

"I s'pose," he said with painful clarity, "that 'twas as good a send-off as they could give 'im. Le's go home." He leaned back in the seat and was promptly asleep. Barbara drove them home . . .

Jerry was up with the first click of the alarm next morning, ate a silent breakfast, and went to work with no further sign.

Next weekend, thank heaven, was payday weekend. She was dressed and waiting when Jerry arrived home. He shed cork boots and tin hat on the back porch, whistled loudly and appreciatively at her, emptied his pockets on the kitchen table, took off his shirt and trousers and hurled them on to the back porch, shed pants and socks on his way into the shower, where he turned on the water full blast and whooped and whistled vigorously and came out blowing and dripping and groping for the big towel that Barbara had ready.

"Hurry and get dressed," said Barbara, swiping the mop at the puddle he'd left on the kitchen floor. She trailed him across the living-room to the bedroom door, saying, "Why couldn't they have put the shower off the bedroom, where it belongs?"

Jerry caught her, bent her far back in Valentino style. "Good heavens, woman," he murmured breathily, "do you think galvanised pipe comes for free?" He kissed her thoroughly, if damply, let her stand back on her feet, then shouted and ducked away from her restricted effort to hit him with the mop handle.

When Jerry was dressed they drove to the city and the Hotel Beaumont, which was enormous, almost cavernously dim-lit, and quietly elegant. The desk clerk greeted Jerry by name as he registered, took the card, and handed Jerry a small white envelope. "Your tickets, Mr. Hillard. We hope you'll have a pleasant stay."

" Oh, I trust we shall," said Jerry with monumental politeness. " I truly trust we shall."

Barbara gave him a quick suspicious look, and he returned a glance of such pious innocence that she was tense and nervous all the way up in the lift. He fairly glowed with virtuous propriety as he escorted her down the passage, preceded by the bellboy, who carried their one small bag and Barbara's overnight case. And just as the boy bent to unlock their door, Jerry pinched Barbara with such fiendish finesse that she jumped and squealed and very nearly bumped the boy through the door.

She turned on Jerry violently, but he scooped her up and carried her into the room, dumped her on the bed and tipped the grinning bellboy.

The boy departed, still grinning, and Barbara said, " Jerry, won't you ever grow up? The very idea! "

He said, " I thought it was a fine idea. Here." He dropped the envelope in her lap.

It held two tickets to a touring-company performance of a spectacularly successful play. She squealed in delight and popped off the bed and threw her arms wide. " My hero! " she cried.

" My beamish bride! " He struck an attitude, gathered her carefully in, and waltzed her to the bureau and back. They bumped into the bed and fell across it together. Jerry nibbled at her left ear-lobe.

" You're crazy," said Barbara.

" You bet I am," said Jerry . . .

Quite a while later, Jerry said, " I imagine we'd better get going if we're going to catch that show."

" What show? " murmured Barbara.

" That show, kitten. You know."

" Oh yes. That show. Well, I suppose so."

" You know what I'd like? " he murmured.

She murmured back, " No. What would you like? "

" I'd like a ham sandwich and a cup of coffee, and—"

She shoved him off the bed.

It was a wonderful payday weekend.

They drove back to the camp in soft Sunday dusk. Jerry had taken off his jacket and loosened his tie. He looked very brown and handsome and just attractively rumpled.

She moved closer, leaned her cheek against the muscular pad of his shoulder. Closing her eyes she thought of the hotel, and the luxury of fitted carpets and unlimited hot water and Sunday papers in bed and room service and television and dim-lit dining-rooms and Jerry poised and polished and handsome, and surely no one would ever believe he was a big roughnecked timberbeast.

" Have fun, kitten? " asked Jerry softly.

" Mmm-hmm," she said, without opening her eyes.

The camp was hot. It was overwhelmingly hot. June was gone, and July, and half August. The woods were tinder-dry. Even the

few carefully tended scraps of lawn in the camp were browning. Barbara washed dishes in the hellhole of a kitchen, while Jerry and George sat at the woodpile, talking.

The timekeeper came along just then to tell Jerry there was a phone call for him at the office.

Barbara finished quickly. The company's private phone system was seldom used for personal calls, and those of only the most urgent nature. She thought of her father and Aunt Vivian, of accident and quick-striking illnesses, but when Jerry returned, he merely said, " Just Earle again. Still trying to make a sawdust-eater out of me."

Later, when they were in bed, she questioned him further, and he said carelessly, " Ah, Earle's the personnel man down at the plant—the mill. Trying to talk me into a job down there."

" What kind of job? " she demanded.

" Ah, a desk job. Shipping—sales—I don't know. Some sort of glorified clerk."

" Well, they wouldn't keep you in a clerk's job very long. You know that."

" They're not going to keep me there at all."

" But, darling, we could live in *town*. We could—"

" Look, kitten, no. I'm a timberbeast. I like it. Nobody's holding a gun at my head."

" But you don't have to be a timberbeast. You can do better."

" What's better? Look, I saw one of my college buddies this last year. Rising young executive. Second assistant to the third vice-president's assistant in charge of something or other. I make better money than he does. He's hocked to the ears for the next twenty years on a big house in the suburbs. So O.K., he's got me there, but we're young and healthy. This won't be our lifelong home."

" Well, you certainly never said anything to me about moving! "

He said thoughtfully, " Well, I've been thinking of going to work for Sheckley's. They've got a rag camp up behind Bear Butte. A string of tents along a creek. Dip your coffee pot upstream and take your bath down. None of this old—"

" Oh, Jerry, be serious! "

" All right, durn foolishness aside, that's the way it is. I'm a timberbeast and glad of it. I'm a climber and proud of it. They don't hang a set of irons and belt on the first punk who comes down the pike and say, ' You're the climber.' There aren't many of the big high-lead shows left, that's true; but when and if they're all finished, I figure I'll still get along.

" Maybe I'll be driving a truck—maybe running my own little logging show. But we'll eat regular, and we'll have a roof overhead, and we'll live it up a little on payday, and ground-squirrel a few bucks against a rainy day. But if I sweat it out behind a desk it'll be my own desk, and if I get an ulcer it'll be over my own business and not because some bright young assistant is out to get my job."

She lay still in the darkness. " All right," she said at last.

The silence lengthened. " No need to get huffy, kitten. It's

just the way it is. I didn't intend to hurt your feelings," he said.

"No. Of course not."

He reached out and touched her. She lay still, unresisting, unresponsive. More silence. Then he said softly, "All right, kitten. Good night."

She did not answer. He sighed and rolled over. A little later, he was asleep. She did not sleep for a long time.

The hot spell broke before a storm frightening in its strength. Barbara could almost think she had never heard wind before; certainly never roaring like unleashed Furies through trees a hundred feet tall all about her. The hammering of water threatened the very roof above her. It cascaded in sheets from the unguttered eaves. It turned the dusty street into mire. From stifling hot, the cabin went clammy cold. Thursday it rained, and Friday and Saturday and Sunday. It was a gloomy weekend.

Shortly before noon on Monday, Jerry frightened her speechless by coming to the front door with no more warning than two crunching steps and the thrusting open of the door.

"Barby," he said. His tone brought her about sharply, staring. "Now, listen," he said. His face was bleak; water dripped from the edge of his tin hat. "We've brought George in on the speeder. Widow-maker got him. He's hurt pretty bad, but he's not dead. We want you to tell Nora. Tell her as easy as you can and stay with her. I'm asking Mrs. Crawford to stay with the kids. You drive her to the hospital. I'll ride with George. You've got that? I've got to go now."

"All right." She was dazed, and then almost panicky. "But how will I tell her, Jerry? What will I say?"

He gave her a small, taut smile. "Just do the best you can, kitten."

Nora took it without outward expression. Her smile of greeting for Barbara faded to an expression that showed nothing at all. She leaned back against the sink, her hands clutching the edge until her knuckles were white. She stared at Barbara with a terrible intensity; stared while the corners of her pale lips turned down, while two deep lines formed, bracketing her compressed lips; stared silently until one harsh sound was driven from her, and then she wheeled away, facing the wall.

Mrs. Crawford came hurrying through the door, a coat thrown over her head and shoulders. "Ah now, honey," she said in her big harsh voice, "he'll be all right. You go on along now, and don't you fret. I'll look after the kids."

In a voice like two stones grating together, Nora said, "Yes. Thanks, Hildy." Without looking at either of them, she went into the bedroom and came back with a coat over her shoulders.

The drive to the city was interminable. The wait in the hospital was worse. After what seemed hours, a nurse told them that George had been taken from X-ray to Surgery.

More hours went by, a long dragging second at a time. Jerry

sat on a chrome-and-imitation-leather sofa, his cork boots beside it on the floor. He looked out of place in his black jeans and wool socks, his tin hat upside down on the floor beside his boots, his working shirt still showing the marks of ironing, still clean because he hadn't worked half a day in it yet. From time to time he prowled restlessly, scuffing in a pair of slippers that a nice little nurse's aide had brought for him. Nora scarcely moved. An eternity later, the doctor came to the waiting-room.

" He has a good chance," he said. " We can't promise more, but he has a good chance. You can see him, if you like, though he's still under the anæsthetic."

So they went and saw him, Barbara and Jerry stopping at the door, Nora going on inside. George was a long shape under the blankets, head bandage-swathed, breathing stertorously. Barbara swallowed hard.

They returned to the waiting-room, leaving Nora and a nurse with George. Jerry let out a great whooshing breath and scrubbed roughly at his face with the flat of his hand.

" Rough," he said. " Real rough." He looked up at the clock. " Look, why don't you and Nora stay at the hotel tonight, or a day or so, or whatever. I've just about got time to grab something to eat and catch the log train, but I'll be back tomorrow night. So what do you say we—"

She said in disbelief, " You're not going back up there tonight? "

" Got to," he said reasonably. " Got to shift the bull block tomorrow."

She said almost wildly, " But not now, Jerry! "

" Honey," he said, " I'd like to stick around, too. But the strip's cut and ready to yard."

" Who cares about the strip? Or the yard or—or anything. It's killed Mick and done its best to kill George. You can't go back there. I won't have it! "

He looked down at her. " Kitten, I know it's a strain. Neither of us is on an even keel right now. So I won't even try to argue the point with you. They'll cash a cheque for you at the hotel if you need it. I think I'll skip eating for now. And I'll see you tomorrow."

He reached out and brought her to him with no more effort than if she was a rag doll, brought her close and kissed her hungrily, released her and said huskily, " Kitten, don't you go 'way on me now." He stooped and snatched up his boots, short slicker, and tin hat, and went scuffing away in the hospital's slippers.

Barbara slumped to the sofa and cried until the nice little nurse's aide came to inquire if she was all right, and Barbara assured her she was, wiped her eyes, and blew her nose, left a message for Nora, and checked into the hotel.

Neither she nor Nora slept well. The next day was interminable, and yet, like Juggernaut's wheel, time ground on, unchecked, relentless, unheeding. By ten o'clock, Barbara was sure she had

been in the hospital a full day. She had looked in on George. He was sleeping—still, or again, she did not know. Nora looked up at the sound at the door. She smiled wanly. Barbara felt the sting of tears in her eyes.

She went back to the hotel. She got a magazine and tried to read, stretched out on her bed. Her near-sleepless night caught up with her, and she woke in some confusion at three-fifteen with a sense of nagging unease.

She washed her face and combed her hair. It was only a little after four that she caught herself looking at the phone. That was silly—it wasn't time to leave yet.

By five o'clock she decided she might just as well wait in the lobby, and went down. At five-thirty she took herself firmly in hand and made herself add up the time. Nevertheless, by six-thirty she had changed chairs twice in the lobby and had gone to the desk to assure herself that there was no message.

At six-forty-five it suddenly came to her. Of course! He'd go to the hospital first. He'd left her there. She arrived in the waiting-room almost out of breath.

He wasn't there. He hadn't come. She checked on that. She compared her watch with the wall clock. Seven-one by her watch. Six-fifty-eight by the clock. She put her watch back. At five past seven he wasn't there, nor by ten past, nor by a quarter past. She looked up at seven-seventeen, and he was in the doorway, his hair bright-beaded and rain-wet.

"Hi, honey," he said. "How's George?"

She stared at him. Then without the slightest intention of it, she burst into tears.

"I don't know!" she cried. "I don't care!"

He came across the room in three long strides. "What is it? What's the matter, kitten?"

Wildly she cried at him, "Where have you been? I've been out of my mind!"

Almost bewilderedly he looked at her and said, "Just stopped to shower and change clothes, kitten. The speeder made slow time. I came as fast as I could."

"You needn't have gone back there in the first place. I've been dying all day, worrying about you!"

He took her by the elbows, gently. "Kitten," he said. "That's silly. The closest I've been to trouble all day was when a big fat character in a big fat car was about to put me into the ditch just out of town. Look, kitten, you're shaken, I know. This has been a little too much for you. Let's go in and see George a minute, and then maybe it'd be better if you just came back with me. Nora'll be all right as long as she knows someone's looking after the kids. Now, come on, honey, it's not so—"

She scrubbed roughly at her eyes with her handkerchief, willing the unwanted tears to stop. She looked him full in the eyes and said with cold deliberation, "I'm not going back to that camp."

Jerry's grin faded.

"Course you are," he said. "That's where we live, kitten."

She said passionlessly, "You don't have to live there, do you, Jerry? I mean, there are other things you could do. Other jobs you could hold."

His voice was taut, but quiet and controlled. "You want to decide where I work and at what, is that it? You want to pick my job for me?"

"Of course not. I'm just not going back to that camp."

She was appalled by the look that came on him; at the utter stillness of his face. In that strange, even quietness, he said, "It has to be a showdown, right now, is that it, Barbara? Suppose I quit my job—say I came down to the mill—supposing I did that; it'd make everything all right?"

She looked at him quickly. "You know it would," she said.

He kept that steady look on her. "Would it now? Suppose a saw buckles or a slab jumps off the live rolls and hits one of the sawdust monkeys. I couldn't work there either. If—"

She said stiffly, "You're trying to make it sound silly."

He went on implacably, "Even if I worked in the office, I'd be down at the plant off and on—even if I was only going round picking up time slips for the timekeeper. No, Barbara, I'm not the one who's trying to make it silly. It is silly."

She said furiously, "It must make you feel wonderful to be so superior!"

"I don't feel superior," he said steadily. "I feel pretty damned miserable, if you want to know."

She said through her teeth, "Good! Then maybe you'll know how I feel."

He kept his steady look on her. Then he said abruptly, "I'm going in to see George and Nora for a moment. Then maybe we can go somewhere and thresh this out."

"Don't you think for a moment that you're going to sweet-talk me out of it. I mean what I say!"

He looked at her, a long sober moment. He said gently, "That's up to you, kitten." He turned away and went out into the hall.

Barbara shook with a deep chill. She could not confess even to herself that she was frightened, and she was half dismayed and half astonished at her anger. He was like a stranger. She cried in silent dismay, What's the matter with him? What's the matter with us?

Staring blankly at the polished floor of the hall visible through the waiting-room door, she found no answer. She heard someone coming, a man's stride, firm and purposeful, and she followed an impulse she could not define. She hurried from the room, out through the big double front doors of the hospital.

Ten minutes later she was on a bus, going home to her father.

Her father's first words were, "Where's Jerry?"

Barbara kept her hands rammed deep in her pockets and said stiffly, "He isn't with me. May I stay here a while, Dad?"

He gave her one quick keen look, and his smile fled. Then he

moved to help her off with her coat. "Of course," he said. "Now what's it all about? You and Jerry had a row?"

"It isn't a row," she said. "I'm through, Dad—absolutely through." And then, desperately resenting it, she burst into tears.

She was enormously grateful that he didn't say anything. He led her to the living-room, sat her down beside him on the couch, and gave her a handkerchief.

She cried quite a while. Then when she was finished she wiped her eyes and blew her nose and tried to smile at him. "I haven't done that since I was fifteen."

"And," he said dryly, "as I recall, that time it was about that Jill whatsername, who'd snaffled your date right under your nose. You had your cry out, and then a glass of hot milk, and then we had a long discourse on the perfidy of men and close friends." He gave her shoulder another pat and got up. "You're a big girl now, so I think I'll prescribe a drop of medicinal brandy: Following which, I'd suggest you sleep on it, whatever it is, and we'll thresh it out over a pot of coffee in the morning."

She said less stiffly, "I'm not fifteen any more, Dad. And I didn't come to get my hot milk and be tucked into bed. I'd like to stay here until I—I can make—other arrangements, but I don't intend to be laughed at or jollied out of it."

"I'm not laughing at you, Barby," he murmured gently. "Don't ever think that. I'll do anything I can to help. And of course you are welcome here. Always."

Quickly contrite, she said, "I'm sorry, Dad. I'm just all wound up . . ."

She woke with a start at six o'clock, stared at the little bedside clock in confusion, remembered, forcibly closed her eyes again. She couldn't sleep. But if she stirred too noisily, she'd wake her father and Aunt Vivian. Nonetheless, half an hour was as long as she could stand it. She couldn't avoid Jerry's things on the dresser top and in the wardrobe; a thin dressing-gown, an extra razor and toothbrush, things kept here ready for their occasional visits. She thought violently she'd have to put them all in a box and ship them back if he didn't come for them. She went down to the kitchen. While she was making coffee, she heard the others stirring upstairs, and so she began preparing breakfast.

The stove was a marvel. She turned a switch, and the coils blushed glowing red. When the bacon began to wisp white smoke, she flipped another switch and an exhaust fan began to hum. Toast popped up just tanned and no more, instead of emerging parched and dry from an oven; she had the grace to admit that the camp's struggling power plant didn't generate enough power for appliances. Jerry had cursed the puttering thing as much as she, though possibly more amiably, and there wasn't much anyone could do about that until the new plant was installed. Not that it made the slightest difference now, whenever it might be.

Her father came down, dressed for work, white shirt crisp, tie precisely knotted, suit pressed. He smiled as she brought his

coffee. She said, " My, you do look handsome this morning."

" Thank you, Barby. You're mighty fetching yourself."

She took his breakfast to him; the one soft-boiled egg in its cup, two thin slices of toast, strawberry jam. It hardly seemed adequate, compared to the meals Jerry ate: the four or five thick rashers of bacon, two or three eggs, a stack of hotcakes, three cups of coffee—and he wasn't above hooking a slice of her toast as an afterthought.

Her father's voice was almost an intrusion. " Very good breakfast, Barby." He put aside his linen napkin.

" Thanks, Dad. You're certainly no trouble to feed."

He looked at her keenly. " Is Jerry? "

" Oh no. Not really. Just as long as there's plenty of it, and it doesn't bite back." She got up quickly and refilled the coffee cups.

Her father said quietly, " I've nearly an hour to spare. Aunt Vivian decided to stay in her room for a little more sleep. If there is anything you want to say or to discuss, I'm at your service, Barby."

" There's nothing you can do, Dad. Jerry has made up his mind, and I think you know him well enough to realise how easy it is to change that! "

" Made up his mind about what? That you two can't make a go of it? "

" If he weren't so confounded stubborn, we could! If he'd—" It spilt out of her then in a flood: the heat and dust and damp and cold; the almost casual death of Mick; Jerry's indifference to opportunity; of George's injury and Nora's ordeal, which had somehow become virtually her own; of Jerry's stubborn refusal to consider a change.

" So," she concluded, " I guess I—I haven't enough influence to beat it—and I don't think in the circumstances I'm callous enough to join 'em. I guess there's nothing more to say."

Her father said gently, " In the circumstances? Is there some factor we're not considering? "

She thrust her coffee cup away. " I think I'm pregnant."

" Well, great day! " said her father softly. Then, " Does Jerry know? "

" No."

" Why? " asked her father quietly.

" Because I wasn't sure, I guess. And—just because. Perhaps I couldn't bring myself to use it as a lever. Perhaps I'd hoped that it wasn't necessary to use a lever on him."

" I see," said her father. " Now, you still feel that this—this thing—whatever it is that is going on between you and Jerry, is so great that there is no solution but separation? "

" All right," she said tautly. " Let's have it that way, if you like. Let's say I'm not cut out to be a pioneer-wife—let's say I think that we're a little past hacking one's home out of the wilds with a trusty axe; and about all I need to round it off now is to be taught

to shoot so as to hold off the Indians when the man of the house is away."

Her father said, "You know why Jerry chose his job?"

She said bitterly, "I know. One, he likes it. Two, it's about the last big high-lead show, and he wants to be in on it. But first or second or last, he likes it. So I can just lump it—that's what it boils down to."

Her father said gently, "Jerry didn't invent it, Barby. Another woman, a long time ago, said it as well as anyone ever has, 'Whither thou goest . . .'"

She said stormily, "I can move to a hotel if it bothers you so much."

"Barby!" her father said quickly, protestingly. Then he gave her a smile, half wry, half amused. "Barby, I remember something your grandfather said. You never knew your mother's father, but he was as Irish as Paddy's pig. 'Niver pack too big a chip on yer shoulder,' he'd say, 'elst somewan use it as a club to bate yer brains out wid.' Well, I'll go along. Service-club luncheon today, so I probably won't see you before this evening. Have a nice day, Barby."

Aunt Vivian came down half an hour later. Her only comment was, "There's just one truly final thing, and that's death. I had as good a man as any woman's allowed for twenty-three years. There hasn't been a day since he died that I haven't missed him, nor a day I spent with him that I'd trade for ten since. I'd give it a good hard think before I did anything serious."

Barbara heard her out in silence and went up to her room.

Two days later, Doctor Cresset confirmed her suspicions. After dinner, Barbara went for a walk. It didn't help.

She went to her room and to bed, but hadn't slept a wink when her father tapped quietly at her door. At her invitation, he pulled a chair round by the bed and sat down. "A bit restless tonight?" he said.

"I just felt like walking."

"Of course," he said absently. Then, plunging ahead, "Barby, this won't do. It isn't a question of your not being welcome. It isn't a question any more of two people who can't see eye to eye. There's a baby coming, and no matter how far away it may seem just now, it must be considered. It'll be your baby, and it'll be mine because it will be my grandson. But it will be yours and Jerry's, and no amount of disagreement can change that. Your place isn't here. It's with Jerry."

She said hotly, "Or maybe his place is with me. Doesn't anyone consider that?"

Her father looked at her closely. "Barby," he said finally, "I telephoned Jerry tonight."

"You didn't tell him! You didn't, Dad?"

"No. I told him you were here. I told him I thought it was pretty silly that you two were apart just now."

Reluctantly she asked, "And what did he say?"

"He agreed."

"He would. And I suppose he made caveman noises and threatened to come and snatch me back by the hair."

Her father said slowly, "No, he didn't." He grimaced. "The peacemaker's lot is not a happy one, Barby. Each party likes to use him as a whipping boy for the other. No, he was very polite, Barby. Polite and distant. That was what hurt most. I thought he and I had come a long way towards being friends."

She said hotly, "He's got a nerve, getting on his high horse with you!"

Her father said quietly, "Not really me, Barby. I was the middleman. I represented you just then. That's why it's no good. The things you've said to him—his reaction, through me—it's no good, Barby. Now look. He's at the hotel where you always stay in the city. We can be there in an hour or so. Let me take you back to Jerry, where you belong."

"Of course," she said dryly, "he's curt and distant with you, so let's haul me back to him as a peace offering."

Again he regarded her long and steadily. Finally he sighed. He rose and looked down broodingly. "I don't mind being the whipping boy if it will bring an end to it. But this one I can't really solve for you, Barby. I can try to help, but in the end it must be your decision. I hope it will be the right one."

She nearly called after him as he left the room. She wanted to bring him back and tell him she was sorry, that she was being mean and bitter and she didn't really know why. She didn't want to hurt him. She didn't want to hurt anyone. But it seemed that everyone was hurt, including herself. But she hadn't touched Jerry. She hadn't moved the great muleheaded oaf in the least. All right, if he wanted to be pigheaded, he could just be pigheaded. Then she quickly switched off her light: it seemed easier to cry in the dark...

Sunday was dismal. There was sunshine. There were fresh-cut flowers in the sitting-room. Aunt Vivian asked her to come to church, but she didn't want to go and didn't bother to think why. She wandered restlessly, picked up the paper by her father's chair, and a headline caught her eye. Then she wondered whether her father had left the paper so folded for her benefit. According to the item, a big network television show was to film an episode of the high-lead logging operation on location at Iverson Logging Company's holdings. Barbara put the paper back and went for a walk.

Her father's first mention of the item gave her the answer. With an expression half deprecating, half resolute, he said, "You saw the item about the TV show they're making of Jerry's job?"

"I saw it."

"Well, Barby, I've got involved in the thing—mainly because I'm cashier of the bank, and Iverson has a business office here. Anyway, they want me and a couple of other local men on the show. We'll go up to where they're logging and be interviewed against the background of the operation; showing how the economy of the

region is affected by the logging industry, and so on. We'll be the dry, informative part of the programme. The big part of it will be the actual logging—bringing in logs, loading, and so on. But it seems that Jerry will be the real star of the whole thing. They want to get pictures of him topping a tree, rigging it—that sort of thing."

"I see," said Barbara without inflection.

Her father took a deep breath. "You're going with me, Barby."

A pulse began to hammer in her temple. She said as calmly as she could, "You're taking something for granted, aren't you, Dad?"

Her father said with an air she had never seen in him before, "Maybe I am, Barby, but this once it will have to be as I say. Jim Prescott, of the Chamber of Commerce, happened to mention it before anything could be done—the fact that Jerry is my son-in-law—and the publicity man of the TV company heard it and picked it up—and there we are."

"I'm not going," said Barbara.

Her father looked at her. "You're going," he said. "Jim Prescott knows you're here; so do the TV people, now."

"That's not my concern."

"It's mine, Barby. We'll be leaving early in the morning; wear something warm." His look said the subject was closed.

To her surprise, she was awake before her father tapped at her door. With that new, odd note in his voice, he said, "Ready, Barby? Breakfast in ten minutes."

Equally to her surprise, she heard herself saying, "All right, Dad."

She was wearing short laced boots and slacks and a sweater and a coat with a hood. Her father said merely, "You're looking fine, Barby," as she sat down to breakfast.

They joined a small convoy of cars and trucks at the Chamber of Commerce building, drove out to the Buck Hill road and went jouncing up that, turned on to an equally rough fire trail, rode more bumpy miles, to come quite suddenly on an Iverson Logging speeder waiting where the fire trail crossed the logging-company railroad tracks.

Filming equipment was loaded on a trailer behind the speeder, a square, boxlike vehicle powered by a bellowing truck motor which drove its flanged wheels on the rails. The driver was a laconic, short, and heavy man who chewed tobacco and spat from time to time through an orifice in the top deck through which came the various levers for operating the machine. He wore overalls and a visored cap. His boots were innocent of corks but the timberbeast stamp was on him. He drove the machine at what seemed a break-neck pace, the speeder pitching and rolling frighteningly on the rough and uneven roadbed. The speeder monkey rode it with a swaying, unconcerned detachment, as a cowpuncher might his horse, or a sailor his ship's deck.

After what seemed a long while, he eased off the throttle, crept round a final curve and came frighteningly head-on with a huge

black locomotive, whose steam-whistle rapped out a peremptory "poot!" The speeder's iron brakeshoes grabbed with a grinding clash, and the speeder monkey said, "Far's we go. Have to hoof it the rest of the way."

On the heels of that, a man came from round the locomotive, wearing a tin hat and whipcord cruiser jacket and trousers. Tom Conners, the boss in charge of this particular logging "side," recognised Barbara, said civilly, "Hullo, Mrs. Hillard," and then, to the rest of them, "Let's get this stuff unloaded. Be a couple of knot bumpers along to help grunt in a minute."

They descended from the speeder and stepped into the deep-woods scents of fir and cedar and damp earth and ferns. Towering trees loomed on either side, blotting out virtually all vision save that of the sky overhead. Looking back the way they had come, the wide slash of grading, with the shimmering, uneven twin brightness of the steel rails was a wound unhealed. Ahead, beyond the locomotive, one could envisage hurricane—tornado—disaster beyond comprehension.

Great trees lay jackstrawed, trees a hundred feet in height toppled, piled one on top of another, jumbled, twisted, laced together. Here and there were shorter trees, some with broken limbs or long pale scars where falling giants had brushed them, still standing like lost and dismayed children. Somewhere on the far fringes of cataclysm a power-saw snarled as ten thousand enraged bees the size of eagles might snarl; a human voice emitted a wordless whoop, and amid a distant cracking and splitting and wrenching, still another of the towering giants began to lean. It tilted and leaned and shuddered and then it came down; and moments after came the great sighing breath of its passage and then the shuddering crash of its final stop.

In the roughly circular clearing of the landing were great hulking machines, a scattering of rough board shacks on skids, the great ragged sprawling pile of logs already yarded in; the spar tree, an enormous towering shaft, as the focal point, the blunt top of it hung with huge pendent blocks, and a spiderweb of bracing guy lines forming a tremendous empty pyramid. The skidder, the donkey, squatted in a web of cables like a lumpish, violent spider.

The donkey emitted a ridiculous, high-pitched "poot!" on its whistle and then its bellowing exhaust began to hammer as a great steel drum turned and cable shrieked and flipped and tautened and was snatched, grinding and straining, on to the drum.

The load came into view, three long logs, hustled along without ceremony, each dangling on a noosed thread, two of them trailing fairly sedately, one end up, the other down, but the third, noosed near the middle, swung and twisted as if struggling for escape.

They came on swiftly, and the illusion of distance was gone; they were huge, these logs—sixty or seventy feet in length, four feet or five in thickness at the butt ends. The great bull block on the spar tree lipped the cable through and held it high, held up the chokers and log butts and led them directly to the log deck. Now

the huge uptilted logs loomed, slanting high in the air, as threatening as upraised clubs; their trailing ends smoking and scouring, ploughing trenches in the earth, thrusting aside stone and limb and forest duff, grinding off bark and scorched wood and steaming sap.

They came hustling and grumbling and grinding to the foot of the tree, thudded and boomed and thumped upon the bodies of their brethren jackstrawed about the tree as they were dropped unceremoniously. They rocked to and fro where they fell—one rolled a couple of turns and then was still.

From nowhere a man popped up, a timberbeast in bright tin hat and dirty torn shirt and skin-tight, pitch-shiny stagged trousers; he danced over the great pile of logs, nimble and catfooted and sure in his cork boots.

He kicked the chokers loose, unsnapped the nubbins from the bells and skipped lightly away, stabbing a clenched hand with thumb upright in the air as he cleared the last log and scurried clear. The donkey chattered and snatched the bull line taut, snapped the chokers out from under the logs, and took them up dancing and whipping at the air, flailing the great heavy cast-steel bells about as if they were knots on a string. Then the haul-back line screeched on its drum, and the chokers went scurrying back along the bull line, twisting and kinking and lashing about as they went. One seemingly no more than touched a thirty-foot adolescent fir, touched and coiled and caught and the fir was plucked from the earth and snapped casually aside, and the quick-running bull line did not even check.

To Barbara, it was at once familiar and strange; ordinary and overwhelming. She had never seen it before, but Jerry had described it so often, so graphically, that she recognised most of what she saw at first glance. Against the raw violence, her father and the TV men, despite their outdoor garb and hunting boots, looked urban and out of place.

Tom Conners said, " We'll have to be getting on over to the new spar tree if you're goin' to catch that part of it."

They followed Conners' lead, skirting the downed timber, climbing a slope, and crossing an easy crown. They came out into a rough clearing. A dozen trees had been dropped, in a pattern radiating from one enormous fir still standing. A small Diesel donkey, its sled runners cocked slightly up at the bow, squatted against its tail-hold stump. A gasolene generator sat alongside one felled tree, and a camera crew had set up a platform between two more, the cameras cocked up in a neck-craning pose.

High on the tall fir a limb drooped, broke loose, fell—as slowly and gracefully as a feather falling, and yet, when it struck, the earth telegraphed the blow like a small electric shock.

An alert youngish man wearing dark glasses spoke into a microphone from one side of the camera setup. " Speed on Two. He's coming round. Cut One."

Barbara looked up—and gasped. It was Jerry, unmistakable even at this distance. A thick leather belt almost a foot in width

clasped him about the hips. A heavy rope ran through metal loops about the belt, on round the tree, back to a cat's-paw knot at Jerry's right hip. From the belt swung a line, and dangling at the end was a one-man crosscut saw. Another line supported a short-hafted, double-bitted axe, and this he fished to him now, stepping round the tree on a pair of iron stirruplike climbing hooks, lifting the axe and swinging it with driving strokes of his powerful arms, smoothly chopping off a thick limb mere inches above the taut encircling rope which was all that held him there. The axe blade flashed and thudded; a miss or a glancing blow could sever the rope, steel-cored though it might be, with practically no effort at all. Barbara closed her eyes.

She heard a final ringing note from the axe, a cracking and snapping, and she looked again, to see the limb detach itself and start its deceptive, soft feathery fall. Again it shook the earth with its impact.

Barbara took her eyes away from Jerry with an effort. She looked about almost desperately. The camera crews moved with quiet, businesslike precision. Everyone's full attention was riveted on that small giant so high yonder, the giant diminished by distance and overwhelmed by the still-more-gigantic and living tree on which he laboured. Even on the donkey, the operator leaned on his shiny levers and looked upward, his jaw bulging with a tobacco cud, his face showing no particular emotion, but his attention completely held on Jerry.

Jerry reached down one-handed to clip some small projection with the axe before letting it swing to the end of its line. He made a slow survey all about, working himself round the tree and back again. He took up a little slack in the tree-girdling rope, stamped his hooks in solidly, fished up the axe and began to lay into the tree trunk itself, spinning broad white chips from the high, distant kerf, chips that spun lazily out and down and seemed to rush as they neared the earth, slamming and thumping and bouncing at the end of their long fall.

Said the man with the mike, "One, give me a pan on that group round the tree, drop down to the falling stuff, hold it there for an eight count. Then back up to him for the long shot."

Jerry finished his undercut, dropped the axe to the end of its line, fetched up his saw and began the back cut, these sounds as soft as the shushing of small breezes high in the tree's remaining limbs, a tip not unlike a green-brown candle flame, perhaps a hundred feet above the earth. Drifting floury particles fell from the saw, and these fell soundlessly, small bits of chewed sawdust too small to register an impact.

The softly snoring sounds went steadily on, drowned now and then by the breeze, lifted completely away at times, always a beat behind the motion because of the distance. Then came a report, as of a dull and distant explosion, and the snoring of the saw seemed suddenly much more clear and audible.

Jerry shifted his weight, drew a few more deliberate strokes with

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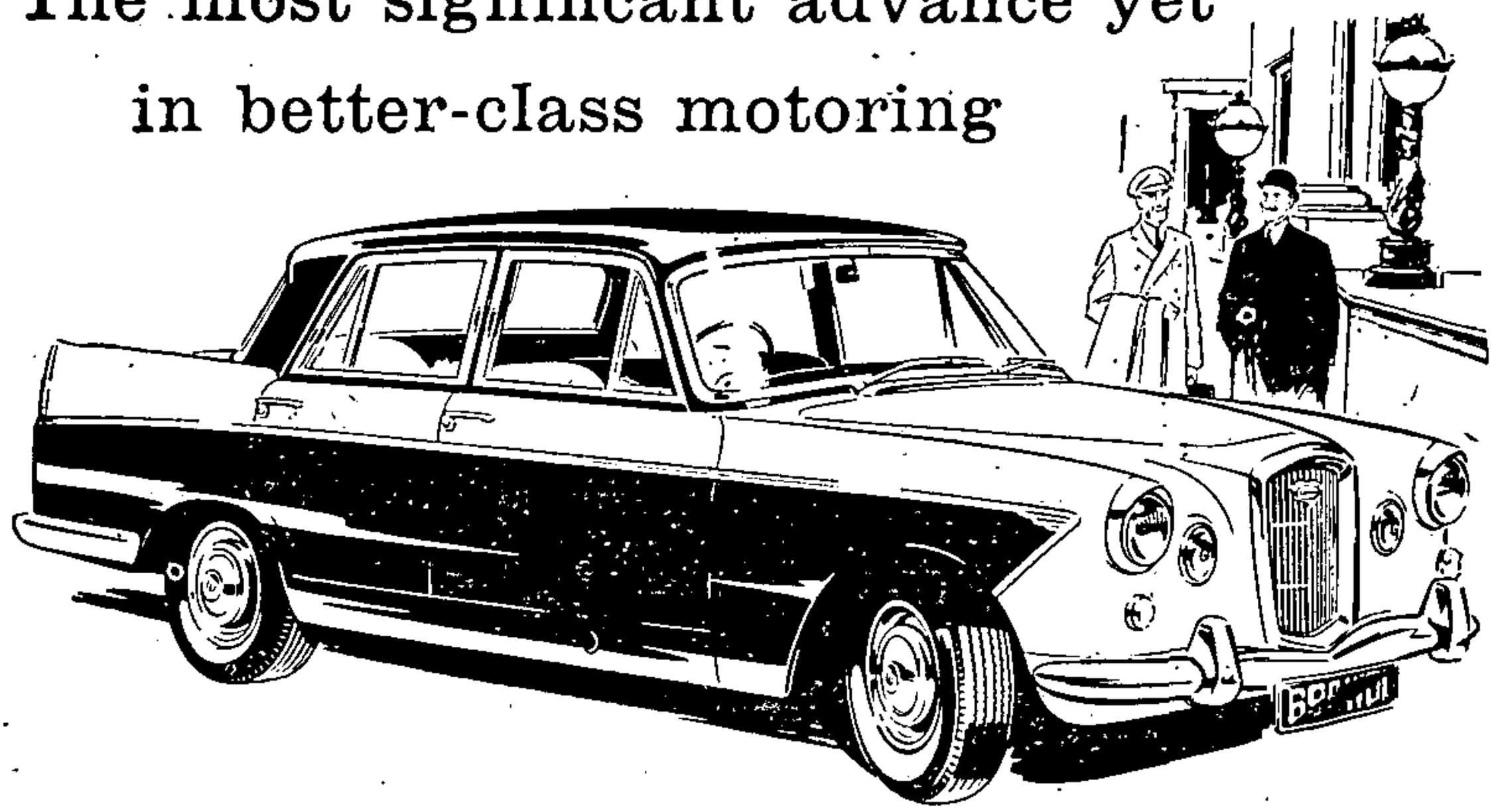

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the saw, then yelled, a clear ringing sound, a shout at once triumphant and gleeful. The top of the tree began to lean.

In that moment all else seemed quiet, muted, even to the chuckle and clang of the idling Diesel engine. The wind came sighing in a distant run through the tips of the enormous trees, and in the high spar Jerry's head turned alertly, and even as he took a sidling step on his spurs, Tom Conners ran forward, trumpeting up through his cupped hands, " Jerry, watch it! Wind's goin' to twist 'er! "

The tip leaned. The lips of the saw-cut widened. Then the soft invisible weight of the wind took the enormous plume of the top as it leaned, took it and pushed it and effortlessly toppled it. The snapping and tearing and popping of strong pitchy fibres came, and then, almost as if abashed at its mischief, the wind fell silent. One harsh gunshot report came from the tree, and the main shaft of the spar kicked out, far out, and the falling tip detached itself and casually brushed against Jerry in its fall. The great bent shaft of the spar, freed of those uncounted tons of weight, snapped in a long clean arc across the sky.

A climber rode it out, that long, long time it took to discharge all the terrible force compressed into the mighty shaft. He rode it out with spurs jammed deep and rope snubbed just right and strong arms braced. He made himself for that time a part of the spar, a chunk as solid as a burl on the parent trunk. These things Barbara knew because Jerry had told her.

But the splintered butt of the twisting top brushed Jerry, nudged him impersonally with its great and heedless weight, and fell free; as the tall spar uncoiled like a sprung bow, Jerry went with it, as limp and helpless as a rag doll lashed to a bough.

Barbara screamed. She never knew whether it was sound that made her throat hurt so, or if she made any sound at all.

Tom Conners vented a great profane shout and went at a lunging run towards the donkey, roaring, " Heave those spare irons and a belt out here, dammit! "

At the end of the first great arc, Jerry's body snapped, jerked with terrible force within the embrace of his rope. His tin hat flew off and began a strange, slow, sidling fall.

In that moment, Jerry's bright-headed, short-handled axe, the glinting, many-toothed crosscut saw, snatched after him at the end of their respective lines, came tumbling, showing their sharp and deadly brightnesses. As the spar snapped back, they hung suspended, squarely in Jerry's track, it seemed, and one of the timberbeasts said warningly, almost casually, " Better watch out for them damn tools."

Jerry couldn't hear him. There was nothing the timberbeast could do, nothing anyone could do, and the great shaft swept back across the sky, missed the glinting tools by nothing much at all, so that they had time to fall nearly to the end of their lines before being snatched back again, to swing in their own arc, off beat to the swing of the tall spar.

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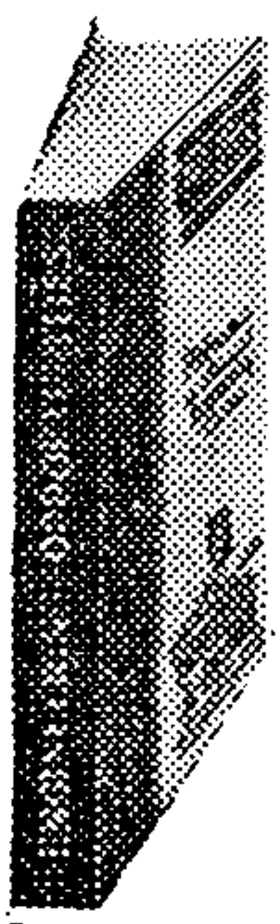

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Jerry hung, still cradled in the belt. His arms swung helplessly, his whole body jarred at the end of each swing, snapped and bent and jerked by the shorter arcs of dying energy within the shaft. Barbara stood frozen, the knuckles of her clenched fists pressed against her lips, her eyes straining with terrible intensity, trying to see any sign, any motion from that terrible slack thing hung high above.

Tom Conners went running awkwardly to the tree, belted and spurred. At the foot of the spar, a timberbeast snatched a bight of the climbing rope, ran round the trunk with it, slammed it into Conners' waiting hand. Conners began to climb, not with Jerry's easy grace, but doggedly, hitching the rope with flips of alternate hands, stamping the spurs with unnecessary force into the bark, always looking anxiously up, not even pausing as another timberbeast came running to hang a light pulley with a line rove through it, on his belt.

Barbara finally felt the arm about her rigid shoulders, heard her father's strained, insistent voice.

" Barby! Barby, honey, come away. It'll be all right. He'll be fine. Just come over here and sit down a moment."

Neither loudly nor impatiently, she said, " Leave me alone, Dad."

Once she was sure she saw Jerry move, and again she was certain that it was only the last faint movement of the spar. Conners climbed with slow persistence. The men on the ground were silent, heads uptilted, a couple of them carefully seeing that the line to Conners' belt did not drag or hamper him.

Conners came level with the saw, slowly swinging and twisting at the end of its line. He paused as his head came even with Jerry's booted feet, paused and craned his neck and peered, and then went on up, hitching himself round so that he kept Jerry's body between his own and the tree. He stamped his spurs deep and took a bit of slack in his rope. He unbuttoned his shirt and brought out a packet.

The cameras purred quietly. Barbara stood in a cold calm, a numbness, as if all sensation was gone and would never return. When she moved, it was stiffly, as if each muscle stirred only on command. Her father's arm was a restraint about her shoulders.

" I'm going over there," she said, and the restraint slackened. She felt his hand on her elbow as she walked, and it was almost as if it was someone else. High above them Tom Conners' voice came in a hoarse bawl. It took a moment for that to filter through, too. Then understanding came.

" All right," came the hoarse, jubilant shout. " Comin' down! "

Barbara felt her knees begin to buckle. Her father's arm clamped about her, almost painfully, and his brisk, pleased voice cried, " He's all right, Barby! He's all right! "

Above them, Conners' voice yelled, " Watch out! Headache below! " The timberbeasts scattered from round the tree with explosive suddenness, and then Jerry's axe and saw fell, trailing their lines like slender whipping pennants.

They came down slowly, awkwardly, Jerry and Tom Conners; they came together, Tom always directly below Jerry, with Jerry moving slowly and clumsily too. And when at last they reached the foot of the tree, Jerry didn't look all right at all. One sleeve was torn from shoulder to elbow, and a rough bandage was about to slip moorings entirely. The side of his face was as raw as chopped meat, and one eye was rapidly swelling shut, and a slow trickle of blood ran from that corner of his mouth.

But his eyes found Barbara, and a smile pulled his lips almost aright, and he said quietly, wonderingly, " Barby—Barby, honey, you did come." Then he blinked rapidly and leaned back against the tree on braced legs. " Y'know," he said almost unbelievingly, " that damn tree prett' near beat me to death."

He grinned a small one-sided grin and put out his hand, and Barbara took it in hers and wanted to laugh and cry, but she didn't. She kissed him as gently as she could on the corner of his mouth, and Conners said dryly, " If you two lovebirds can just bear to break it up a minute, maybe I can get him tied back together again. Come on over and siddown, hero, and let nursey fix you up."

Jerry said, " Sure," without taking his eyes off Barbara's face. " Honey," he said, " you sure look pretty."

" So do you," she said.

" Oh, he's a beaut," said Conners. He finished the bandaging and said, " Well, there ain't a thing I can do about that shirt. Guess you'll just have to buy a new one. Think you can hike it down to the speeder all right? "

Jerry looked away from Barbara. The swollen eye was very nearly closed now. The side of his face was frightfully discoloured from its bruising and the antiseptic with which he had been liberally painted. He shrugged the shoulder experimentally underneath the thick pad of bandages.

" Yes, sure," he said. He stood up. " Just as soon as I hang my hand-line block."

Conners said quickly, " You know you don't have to do that."

Jerry grinned tautly. " If you said so, Tom, I'd poke you right in the nose. But that's what I'm going to do. Then if you want to rig 'er, you go ahead. But I came down without hanging my block."

Conners gave him a long, careful look. " Suit yourself, chum," he said, " but you've got nothing to prove to me."

For just a moment Jerry's grin faded. Then he said, " No, not to you, Tom. Where's my belt? "

Barbara cried in disbelief, " Jerry, you're not serious! You're not going back up there again? "

" Just up and down, kitten," he said. " Just long enough to hang this little block."

" No," she said. " No, Jerry, I can't let you do it! "

Jerry studied her carefully with his one good eye. Then without looking away, he said, " Tom, could you excuse us just a minute, please? And tell 'em to turn that damned camera away before I smash it."

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"Sure," said Conners neutrally. He turned away and stalked towards the camera crew.

Jerry said sombrely, "Barby darling, I'm sorry. I thought it would work out, but it won't. Not like this, it won't work, Barby."

She cried at him desperately, "Why, Jerry? Why must you do this? Why must you climb that damned tree? Why, Jerry?"

He kept his brooding look on her while he slowly shook his head. "I don't want to," he said in a hoarse, growling whisper. "I don't want to do it at all. But I'm going up there to hang that little hand-line block before I come down. Because that's what I've got to do while I'm still hurtin' and while I'm still scared."

She said through lips that felt stiff as leather, "And why is it, Jerry, that you won't do it for me? Why is it you won't stop—for me?"

"Barby," he said slowly, "I love you so damned much it hurts me inside. But a man has to do his work, Barby. A man has to choose his work, whatever it is. It would be easy enough to give in, Barby, because I love you. It's hard to deny you anything. But if I quit, I think that would be the end of it, Barby. That would be the day it would start dying, and maybe it'd be the beginning of starting to hate you. Or maybe it'd just turn into one of those grey things where two grey people live together for a lifetime and just tolerate each other. I won't have that—not with you. I'd rather it went quick like this, like lopping it off with an axe; now, while it's the way it is, without any kids to worry about, without any more to tear apart than you and me. So maybe that's the the best way after all. Good-bye, Barby."

His hand rose, reached out, touched her cheek, and then he turned away and stalked stiff-legged in his climbing irons, yelling loudly, wanting to know where his thus-and-such belt was.

Barbara shook with a deep-seated chill. She felt her lips trembling, and she wheeled away and bent her head and rammed both hands deep into the pockets of her coat. Her father said gently, tentatively, "Barby? You all right, honey?"

She lifted her head quickly. "I'm—all right, Dad." She looked at him and wondered if the tremor inside was visible. "He's—he's going back to—to climb that thing again."

"Yes," said her father. "I see. But he'll be down again."

She said with that odd, cold precision, "But not to me, Dad. He's not coming back to me. He made his choice—quite deliberately."

"I'm sorry, Barby," he said softly. "I'm truly sorry. But you gave him an almost impossible choice." He lifted his eyes, tilting his head back. Barbara's eyes followed his.

Jerry was climbing. Not so quickly, not so deftly. His injured shoulder was obviously hampering him, but he was climbing, tin hat at a tilt, his long hand-line trailing down from his belt.

"There's a man," said her father, more for himself than anyone else. He stood silent, head tipped back, watching. Then,

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SEAN O'FAOLAIN

Love's Young Dream

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Also in this issue: Gerald KERSH
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reluctantly, he looked away. When he spoke it was in his normal, quiet tone. And yet, beneath that, there was a deadness, a flatness.

"Maybe we'd better go," he said. "We can wait where you won't have to watch it."

"No," said Barbara. She did not look away. Her throat was dry; carefully she had to keep her lips from trembling, but she did not look away from the high lonely figure. "No," she said, "I'll wait."

Jerry gave his climbing rope its last flip, planted his spurs, took in his slack and yanked the knot tight. With a short length of line he threw a bight about the tip of the tall spar, standing as straight and still now as the mast of a ship at anchor. He hung the small block from his belt and rove his hand-line through, and with arm's-length reaches he hauled it through until the rove end reached the ground and one of the men on the ground caught it and pulled slack.

Jerry leaned back into his belt, depending his whole weight on the rope and leather. His head turned as he looked about, at the high, gently swaying giants above him, above and beyond them to vistas unseen and unseeable from the ground. Almost visibly a sureness came on him, a subtle lift and tilt to his head and shoulders. His hand went up to his tin hat, and from the height came his almost frightening roar, "Headache below!"

Then he threw the glinting hat high in the air and seemed to kick both spurs loose simultaneously, even as he leaned into the tree and flipped his rope downwards. The men under the tree burst away like an exploding covey of quail, and Jerry dropped a good eight feet, ten; and then his body tilted out and a spur caught, and his arm in perfect co-ordination again flipped the bight of rope downwards, the knee broke outwards and snapped the spur free, and again he plunged, caught himself with the other spur, and again and again, while the timberbeasts, safely ringed out from the tree, shouted profanely and gleefully, and the tin hat, slowly turning, began its long fall.

It was a fearful thing to see Jerry come down that tree. Once his right spur tore out a shard of bark as big as a dinner plate, and he slewed on the rope and drove the other spur, sliding it three feet along the rough bark, tearing out a furrow wide and deep enough to bury a strong man's arm, and then again he caught his almost-falling speed and came on.

He looked up once, caught sight of the falling, turning hat, again kicked free and made a long drop of it, was caught and overtaken by the hat, and he shouted, a sound gleeful, and wholly alive, and then he checked himself and came on more sedately, until some eight feet above the ground, where he flipped the rope carelessly free, dropped, checked himself with one spur a foot above the ground and turned to step off the tree as another man might the bottom step of his front porch.

He was grinning, an awkward, lopsided grin, a malevolent grin, with his face bruised and eye swollen. He strode, unbuckling the

belt, letting it fall. Then slowly the grin faded, and he said shortly to Conners, " There's the hand-line. 'Rig 'er if you want, but I'll be ready to hack 'er tomorrow."

" Sure. Speeder's got clearance to run you on in. Get goin'."

Someone brought his tin hat. He looked at the dent in the side of it and clapped it on his head at a cocky tilt. He stopped, yanked loose the straps on the climbing irons, and kicked free of them. He started to walk away, and Barbara felt her father's touch on her arm, and heard his murmured, " Maybe we'd better just—"

Without conscious volition she moved forward. Without thinking about it, she said, " You go along, Dad." And then she went forward, not quite running, and called, " Jerry! Jerry, wait for me! "

He turned as if in disbelief and saw her coming towards him, and the tired and stricken look fled before his eager, waiting smile, and his arms came out, reaching, and she ran into them.

She felt their sure strength close tight and secure about her and knew she wasn't ever going to leave that. It was like coming home.

She closed her eyes and held herself even closer as he kissed her. It *was* coming home. Here she belonged. Here she would stay.

★ ***SEAN O'FAOLAIN's new short novel appears in next month's ARGOSY, on sale July 8***

SOLUTIONS to HALF A CUCKOO PINT, PLEASE
on page 72

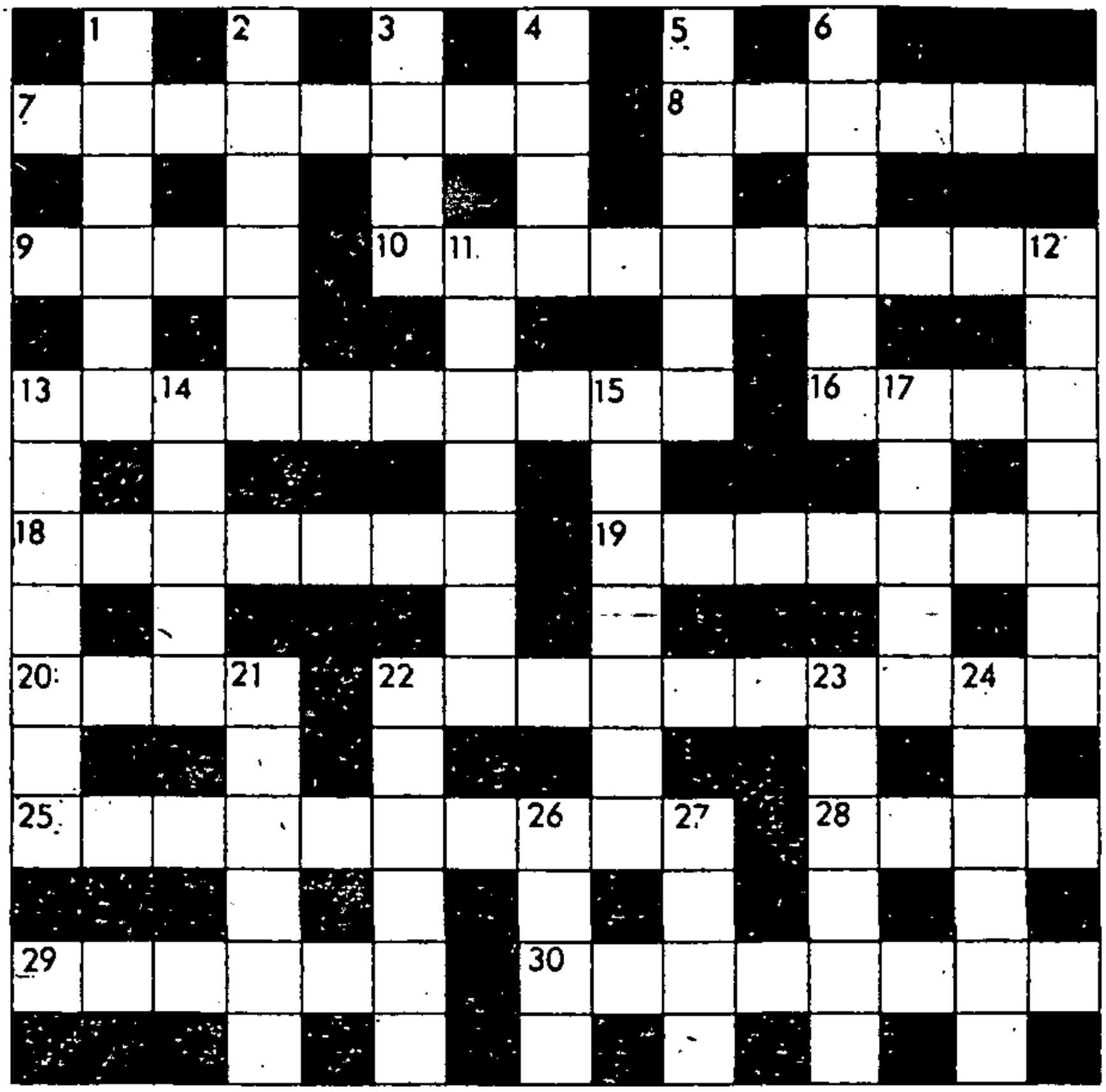
1. *April 14th to June 24th.*
2. *a. Eggs and Marsala; b. Beetroot; c. Pancakes and Curaçao.*
3. *a. The Atlantic ocean between 40 and 60 degrees south; b. Stoke, Desborough, and Burnham, Bucks.*
4. *a. Tunbridge Wells; b. Cambridge; c. Edinburgh; d. Penzance.*
5. *a. Edgar Allan Poe, " The Pit and the Pendulum; " b. Dickens, " David Copperfield; " c. Swift, " Gulliver's Travels."*
6. *Love—they are Love-in-a-Mist, Love-Lies-Bleeding, and pansies or Love-in-Idleness.*
7. *a. Jeffery Farnol; b. Daniel Defoe; c. C. S. Forester; d. Max Beerbohm.*
8. *a. A villain in Struwwelpeter; b. The hero of R. L. Stevenson's " St. Ives; " c. The crab Pau Amma in Rudyard Kipling's " Just So Stories."*

ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 109

★



CLUES

Across

7 Novel terminus (8).

8 Richard III and Silas were wicked ones (6).

9 Against, not spouse of 8 (4).

10 Hobson's choice of drinks (4, 6).

13 Extra—but not in films (10).

16 Pot, it's at random (4).

18 Officer ends by backing rot (7).

19 Has he a taste for caviare ? (7).

20 They're on sale, mixed, at 10 (4).

22 Crazy Ted arrives, boosts wares (10).

25 Vehicles of joy ? (10).

28 Gloom over broken poem (4).

29 Hostility in the rabbits' den (6).

30 French revolutionary starts the long run (8).

Down

1 Divinity graduate embracing Anne ? Censored ! (6).

2 My stars ! Two of them (6).

3 Copybook blemish (4).

4 Jane on circuit ? (4).

5 Lights out below ! (6).

6 Lookout boys to cuss? 6).

11 For ruling hard lines ? (4, 3).

12 Pioneer pays up (7).

13 Lash tap to paving (7).

14 Paradoxically makes things hum (5).

15 Increase to French G-men at tea (7).

17 Injures more than limbs (5).

21 Several mixed dry 'uns (6).

22 Add to a very soft finish (6).

23 Ma's in him and he lives in (6).

24 Take me back to Scottish job (6).

26 Frosty verse (4).

27 Talks Urdu in here (4).

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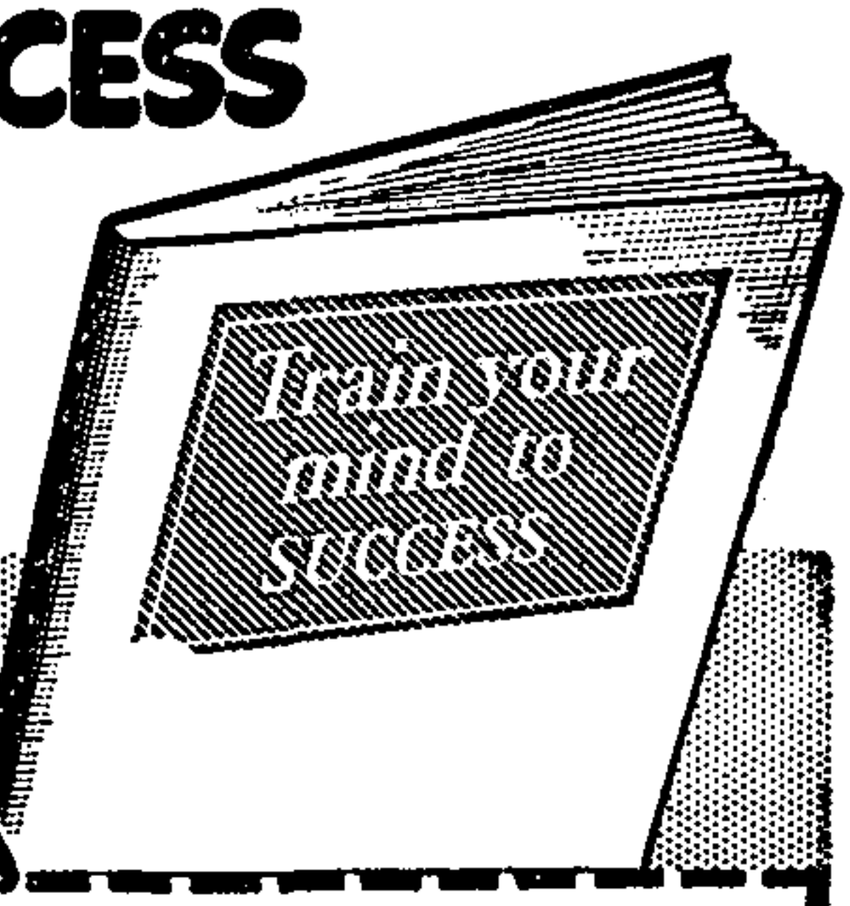

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